THE FIELD GOD

and

IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

By PAUL GREEN

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THE FIELD GOD *And* IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

by PAUL GREEN

LONESOME ROAD: *Six Plays for the Negro Theatre*

THE FIELD GOD
and
IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

By PAUL GREEN 1894-

ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY
New York *Mcmxxviii*

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THE FIELD GOD AND IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

Barrett H. Clark

WHO HAS HELPED ME OVER
SOME ROUGH PLACES

54680

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NOTE: The final *d*'s and *g*'s have been retained in most cases throughout the plays as an aid to reading only. In actual conversation the characters drop them, and often the final *t* likewise. Exceptions are usually where these consonants precede stressed words beginning with vowels.

The Songs in the plays are not strictly Folk-songs or ballads. In most cases the music and the words were written by the author.

IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A NEGRO IN SEVEN SCENES

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SCENES

SCENE I

The turpentine woods of eastern North Carolina, the summer of 1885.

SCENE II

In Abraham McCranie's cabin, spring, three years later.

SCENE III

The school house, winter of the same year.

SCENE IV

A house in Durham, winter, fifteen years later.

SCENE V

The same as Scene II, an autumn evening three years later.

SCENE VI

On a road near his home in Scene II, an hour later.

SCENE VII

The same as Scene II, about thirty minutes later than Scene VI.

CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM MCCRANIE—*a Negro.*

GOLDIE MCALLISTER—*his sweetheart and later his wife.*

MUH MACK—*his aunt.*

BUD GASKINS
LIJE HUNNEYCUTT
PUNY AVERY
} *Turpentine hands for the Colonel.*

DOUGLASS MCCRANIE—*Abraham's son.*

EDDIE WILLIAMS
LANIE HORTON
NEILLY MCNEILL
} *Students to Abe.*

COLONEL MCCRANIE—*a Southern gentleman, once the owner of slaves.*

LONNIE MCCRANIE—*his son.*

SCENE I

IN *the turpentine woods of Eastern North Carolina, forty years ago, near a spring at the foot of a hill. The immediate foreground is open and clear save for a spongy growth of grass and sickly ground creepers. In the rear a wide-spreading tangle of reeds, briars, and alder bushes shuts around the spring in a semi-circle. At the right front the great body of a pine, gashed and barked by the turpentine farmer's axe, lifts straight from the earth. To the left a log lies rotting in the embrace of wild ivy. Maples, bays, dogwoods and other small trees overrun by tenacious vines raise their leafy tops to shade the spot. Through interstices in the undergrowth one can see the pine forest stretching away until the eye is lost in a colonnade of trees. The newly scraped blazes on the pines show through the brush like the downward spreading beards of old men, suggestive of the ancient gnomes of the woods, mysterious and silently watchful.*

At the left front four tin dinner pails hang on a limby bush. The sound of axes against the trees, accompanied by the rhythmically guttural "han—n—h! han—n—n—h!" of the cutters comes from the distance. One of the laborers breaks into a high mournful song—

Oh, my feets wuh wet—wid de sunrise dew,
De morning star—wuh a witness too.
'Way, 'way up in de Rock of Ages,
In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

Presently there is a loud halloo near at hand, and another voice yodels and cries, Dinner time—m-m—e! Git yo' peas, ev'ybody! *Voices are heard nearer, a loud burst of laughter, and then three full-blooded Negroes shuffle in carrying long thin-bladed axes, which they lean against the pine at the right. They are dressed in nondescript clothes, ragged and covered with the glaze of raw turpentine. As they move up to the spring they take off their battered hats, fan themselves, and wipe the streaming sweat from their brows. Two of them are well-built and burly, one stout and past middle age with some pretension to a thin scraggly mustache, the second tall and muscled, and the third wiry, nervous and bandy-legged. They punctuate their conversation with great breaths of cool air.*

YOUNG NEGRO—Monkey walking in dis woods.

OLDER NEGRO—Yah, Jaboh progueing round and 'bout um.

LITTLE NEGRO—While us res' he roos' high in pine tree.

YOUNG NEGRO—Fall on Puny's back 'bout th'ee o'clock, git um down. Hee—hee.

PUNY—Ain't no monkey kin ride me, tell you.

They stand fanning themselves.

OLDER NEGRO—Dat nigger tough, ain't you, Puny?

PUNY—Tough as whitleather, tough 'y God! [*He gets down on his belly at the spring.*] Mouf 'bout to crack, kin drink dis heah spring dry.

OLDER NEGRO—[*Slouching his heavy body towards the pool.*] Hunh, me too. Dat axe take water same lak a saw-mill.

He gets down flat and drinks with the other. The water can be heard gluking over the cataract of their Adam's apples. The YOUNGER NEGRO *opens his torn and sleeveless undershirt and stands raking the sweat from his powerful chest with curved hand.*

YOUNG NEGRO—[*After a moment.*] Heigh, Puny, you'n Lije pull yo' guts out'n dat mud-hole and let de engineer take a drink.

With a sudden thought of devilment he steps quickly forward and cracks their heads together. PUNY *starts and falls face foremost in the spring.* LIJE, *slow and stolid, saves himself, crawls slowly upon his haunches and sits smiling good-naturedly, smacking his lips and sucking the water from the slender tails of his mustache.*

LIJE—[*Cleaning his muddy hands with a bunch of leaves.*] Nunh—unh, not dis time, my boy.

YOUNG NEGRO—[*Scrambling to his feet, stran-*

gling and sputtering.] Damn yo' soul, why you push me, Bud Gaskins?

BUD—[*A threatening note slipping into his laugh.*] Hyuh, hyuh, don't you cuss at me, bo.

PUNY—Why'n't you 'pose on somebody yo' size? Bedder try Lije dere.

BUD *gets down and begins drinking.*

LIJE—[*Drawling.*] Don't keer 'f 'e do. Ducking good foh you dis hot weather.

PUNY—[*Helplessly.*] Allus picking at me. Wisht, wisht—

BUD—Heah I is lying down. Come on do whut you wisht. [PUNY *makes no reply but turns off, wiping his face on his shirt sleeve, and staring morosely at the ground.* BUD *gets to his feet.*] Yah, reckon you sail on me and I jam yo' haid in dat spring lak a fence post and drownd you.

PUNY—[*His anger smouldering.*] Talk is cheap, black man, cheap!

Suddenly afraid of his boldness in replying, he turns and looks at BUD *in a weak pleading defiance.*

BUD—[*Making a frightening movement towards him.*] Mess wid me a-jowing and I knock yo' teef th'ough yo' skull.

LIJE—Hyuh, Bud, you let Puny 'lone.

He moves over to his bucket, gets it and sits down on the log at the left.

BUD—[*Turning for his bucket with a movement of disgust.*] Sho' I ain't gwine hurt him—po' pitiful bow-legs.

PUNY *clenches his hands as if stung to the quick, and then beaten and forlorn reaches for his bucket, the weak member of the herd. He throws off his overall jacket, revealing himself stripped to the waist, and sits down at the pine tree.*

LIJE—[*Laying out his food and singing.*]

'Way, 'way up in de Rock of Ages
In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

BUD—[*Looking at* PUNY'S *bony bust.*] Uhp, showing off dat 'oman's breas' o' yo'n, is you? Haw-haw.

PUNY—[*In sheer ineffectuality answering him blandly.*] Gwine cool myse'f.

LIJE—Me too, peoples. [*He loosens his belt, pulls out his shirt-tails, undoes his shirt, and pats his belly.*] Lawd, Bud, you sho' led us a race dis mawning on dem dere boxes. Musta sweat a peck er mo'.

BUD—[*Taking his bucket and sitting on the ground near the center.*] Race? Hunh, wait till fo' o'clock dis evening, you gwine call foh de ca'f rope, sho' 'nough. [*Tickled at the tribute to his powers.*] And po' Puny, de monkey have rid him to deaf.

PUNY—Ain't no monkey rid me, I tells you. Little but loud. Be raght dere when de hawn blows.

BUD—Mought, and you slubbering yo' work. I cawners my boxes lak de Colonel calls foh. You des' gi' 'em a lick and a promise. Ain't it so, Lige.

LIJE—[*Swallowing a hunk of bread.*] Dunno, dunno. He do all right, reckon.

PUNY—Putt us in de cotton patch, and I kin kill you off de way a king snake do a lizard.

BUD—Picking cotton! Dat 'oman and chillun's job. No reg'lar man mess wid dat. [*Waving his hand at the woods behind him.*] Turpentiming's de stuff.

They fall to eating heartily, peas, side-meat, molasses poured in the top of the bucket-lid from a bottle, bread and collards. The axe of a fourth hand is heard still thudding in the forest.

LIJE—[*Jerking his bread-filled hand behind him.*] Whyn't Abe come on? Time he eating.

BUD—Let him rair. 'On't hurt hisse'f a-cutting. Gitting to be de no 'countest hand I ever see.

LIJE—Useter could cut boxes lak a house afiah.

PUNY—And hack! Lawd, dat nigger could hack.

LIJE—De champeen o' de woods and de swamps.

PUNY—Bedder'n Bud, bedder'n all. Knowed him to dip eight barrels many day.

BUD—Cain't he'p whut has been. Ain't wuth my ol' hat now. Colonel Mack say so too. And I heahd Mr. Lonnie talking rough to him over at de weaving house day 'fo' yistiddy 'bout his gitting trifling heah lately.

PUNY—Been gitting no' count since two yeah' 'go. De time when de white folks hang dat Charlie Sampson on a telegram pole—him whut 'tacked a white 'oman, and dey shoot him full o' holes, ayh!

BUD—Dey did. And dat Abe gut his neck stretched hadn't been foh de Colonel. Fool went down dere in de night and cut dat nigger down and bury 'im hese'f.

LIJE—[*Looking around him.*] 'Twon't do to mess wid white folks and dey r'iled up.

BUD—You said it, bruvver.

PUNY—[*Looking around him.*] Won't do. Keep to yo' work, da's all.

BUD—Yeh, work, work foh 'em. Git yo' money and yo' meat, push on th'ough, axe no questions, no sass, keep to yo' work.

LIJE—Nigger keep mouf shet, let white man do talking. He safe den.

BUD—Safe! You done said. No telegram poles, no shooting, no fiah burn um.

PUNY—Safe is best.

They lapse into silence under the touch of worry, something undefinable, something not to be thought upon. They swallow their food heavily. Presently LIJE *stops and looks at the ground.*

LIJE—Abe ain't safe.

BUD—Eyh?

LIJE—[*Gesturing vaguely behind him.*] Abe talk too much.

BUD—[*Nodding.*] He do, talk too much to white folks.

PUNY—Cain't he'p it, I bet.

BUD—Kin too. Didn't talk much 'fore dat boy wuh hung. Worked hard den and say nothing.

LIJE—Sump'n on he mind. Sump'n deep, worry 'im, trouble—

BUD—Trouble 'bout de nigger, wanter rise him up wid eddication—fact!

PUNY—Hunh, rise him up to git a rope roun' his neck. Nigger's place down de bottom. Git buried in he own graveyard, don't mind out.

BUD—Raght on de bottom wid deir hand and legs, muscle power, backbone, down wid de rocks and de shovels and de digging, dat's de nigger. White man on top.

LIJE—You's talking gospel.

PUNY—Abe say he gwine climb. I heah him tell de Colonel dat.

BUD—Fo' God! Whut Colonel say?

PUNY—He ain't say nothing, des' look at 'im.

LIJE—Abe is bad mixed up all down inside.

BUD—White and black make bad mixtry.

LIJE—Do dat. [*Thumping on his chest.*] Nigger down heah. [*Thumping his head.*] White mens up heah. Heart say do one thing, head say 'nudder. Bad, bad.

PUNY—De white blood in him coming to de top. Dat make him want-a climb up and be sump'n. Nigger gwine hol' him down dough. Part of him take adder de Colonel, part adder his muh, 'vision and misery inside.

LIJE—Ssh!

PUNY—[*Starting and looking around.*] Colonel Mack he daddy, everybody knows. Lak as two peas, see de favor.

BUD—[*Bitingly.*] Talk too much! Little bird carry news to de Colonel and he fall on you and scrush you. Ain't nigger, ain't white whut ail him. Dem damn books he gut to studying last yeah or two. Cain't go to de woods widdout 'em. Look up dere on his bucket, foh Christ sake. [*He points to the remaining tin bucket in the bush. A small book is lying on*

the top under the handle. Snorting.] 'Rifmatic I bet. Give a nigger a book and des' well shoot him. All de white folks tell you dat.

PUNY—[*Pouring molasses on his bread.*] He sma't dough, in his haid. Dat nigger gut sense.

LIJE—Has dat. Gitting so he kin cipher raght up wid de Colonel.

PUNY—[*Looking at* BUD.] Bet some day Colonel Mack put him woods boss over us.

BUD—Ain't no nigger gwine boss me, hoss-cake. Split his haid open wid my axe.

LIJE—[*Leaning back and emitting a halloo.*] Heighp, you, Abe! Dinner! Gwine cut all day?

BUD—Gi' him de full title and he'll heah you.

LIJE—[*Grinning.*] Aberham, Aberham McCranie!

PUNY—Yeh, you, Aberham Lincoln, whut drapped de nigger he freedom from de balloon, you better git yo' grub!

An answering shout comes out of the forest.

BUD—Trying to cut past time, mebbe us'll think he sma't.

PUNY—Don't keer whut you think, Bud, gitting so he look down on you and de rest of us.

BUD—Damn yo' runty soul, whut you know 'bout it? Ain't no nigger living kin look down on me and git by wid it. Do, and I make 'em smell o' dat.

He clenches his heavy fist and raises it to heaven.

PUNY—Jesus! Dat Abe take you up in one hand and frail yo' behime to a blister.

LIJE—Whut make you two black-gyard so much?

BUD—[*To* PUNY.] Keep on, keep on, little man. Some dese days you gwine come missing.

He crams a handful of cornbread into his mouth.

LIJE—[*Drawling.*] Try a little fist and skull and work de bile out'n yo' systems. [*Looking off and singing.*]

"Dark was de night and cold de ground. . . ."

BUD—[*Spitting in scorn.*] Ain't gwine bruise my fistes on his old skull. Don't 'spec' to notice him no mo'. [*He falls to eating in huge mouthfuls.*] But he bedder quit th'owing dat Abe in my face, I tells him dat.

PUNY—Don't see why dat make you mad.

BUD—It do dough. I don't lak him and his uppity ways, I don't.

PUNY—Hunh, and you was one o' de fust to brag on him foh goin' on sho't rations so de Colonel buy him books and learn 'im to teach school.

BUD—Sho't rations. Ain't no sho't rations, and dat Goldie gal bringing him pies and stuff eve'y day. Be here wid a bucket in a few minutes, I betcha. Fool love de ve'y ground he squat on! And he look down

on her caze her ign'ant. And teach school! Been heahing dat school teaching business de whole yeah. He ain't gwine teach no school. Niggers 'on't send to him, dey 'on't. Niggers don't want no schooling.

PUNY—Mought. Abe tol' me dis mornin' dat de Colonel gwine fix it wid de 'missioners or something in town today. I know whut de matter wid you, Bud. Hee-hee.

BUD—Whut?

PUNY—[*Hesitating.*] Abe come riding by in de two-hoss coach. Us'll be bowing and a-scraping. Us'll pull off'n our hats and be "Howdy, Mister Aberham." [BUD *turns and looks at him with infinite scorn, saying nothing.*] And Bud? [BUD *makes no answer.*] Bud?

BUD—Whut?

PUNY—Dat Goldie business whut worrying you, hee-hee. She love Abe and—

BUD—[*Bounding up and kicking* PUNY'S *bucket and food into the bushes.*] Damn yo' lousy soul, minner mind stomp you in de dirt!

He towers over the terrified PUNY, *who lies flat on his back whimpering.*

PUNY—Don't hit me, Bud. Foh Gohd's sake! I des' joking.

LIJE—Go at it, fight it out. [*Singing as he watches them.*]

De bones in de grave cried Ca'vary
De night King Jesus died.

BUD—[*Kicking dirt at* PUNY *and going back to his bucket.*] Done told him now. Ain't gwine say no mo'! Next time be my fist rammed down his th'oat, and turn him wrong side out'ards.

ABE *comes in at the right, carrying his axe. He is a young Negro, with a touch of the mulatto in him, of twenty-five or six, tall and powerfully built, dressed much like the others in cap and turpentine-glazed clothes. He puts his axe by the pine at the right, pulls off his cap and fans himself, while he pinches his sweaty shirt loose from his skin. His shaggy head, forehead and jaw are marked with will and intelligence. But his wide nostril and a slumbrous flash in his eye that now and then shows itself suggest a passionate and dangerous person when aroused. From the change in the actions of the others when he enters it is evident that they respect and even fear him.*

ABE—What's de trouble 'tween you and Puny, Bud?

BUD—[*Sullenly.*] Ain't no trouble.

PUNY—[*Crawling around on the ground and collecting his spilled food.*] Ain't nothing, Abe, I des' spilled my rations.

ABE *gets his book down and seats himself in the shade at the left. He begins working problems, using a stub of a pencil and a sheet of crumpled paper.*

LIJE—Puny, I got some bread left you kin have.

He pulls a harp from his pocket and begins to blow softly.

PUNY—[*Straightening out his mashed bucket and closing it.*] I don't want nothing else, Lije. Et all I kin hold. [*After a moment.*] Putt yo' bucket up foh you.

He gets LIJE'S *bucket and hangs it along with his own in the limby bush.* BUD *eats in silence, puts up his bucket, gets a drink from the spring, and resumes his seat, hanging his head between his knees.* PUNY *goes to the spring and drinks.*

BUD—[*Pouring snuff into his lip.*] Don't fall in an' git drownded, Puny.

PUNY—Want some water Lije?

He goes to the log, curls himself up in the shade beside it and prepares to sleep.

LIJE—[*Stirring lazily.*] Believe I does.

He goes to the spring and drinks, returns to the pine tree and sits down.

PUNY—Ain't you g'in' eat no dinner, Abe?

ABE *makes no reply.*

LIJE—Call him again. [*Touching his head with his finger.*] Deep, deep up dere.

PUNY—Heigh, Abe, bedder eat yo' grub.

ABE—[*Starting.*] You call me?

PUNY—You so deep stud'in' didn't heah me. Bedder eat yo' dinner. Git full o' ants settin' up dere.

ABE—I goin' to eat later.

BUD—Yeh, when Goldie come.

ABE—Hunh!

BUD—You heahd me.

ABE—[*Irritably.*] Don't let me heah no mo'.

BUD—Hunh?

ABE—You heahd me. [PUNY *snickers from his log with audible delight.* LIJE *waits a moment and then lies down.* BUD *reaches out and tears a bush from the ground and casts it angrily from him.*] I'll eat my dinner when it please me, you gentlemens allowing. [*There is a touch of anger in his voice which he apparently regrets on second thought, for he goes on more kindly.*] Goldie said she goin' to fetch me sump'n t' eat to-day. I got to work dis problem. Been on it two days now. Cain't git it out'n my head. Ain't been able to sleep two nights. [BUD *sits staring and spitting straight before him. Presently* LIJE *begins to snore, then* PUNY *follows.* ABE *goes on with his figuring.* BUD *turns over on the ground and goes to sleep.* ABE *becomes more and more absorbed in the problem he is working. He mutters to himself.*] How many sheep? How many sheep? [*He clutches at his hair, gnaws his pencil, and turns to the back of his book.*] Answer say fifteen. Cain't make it come out fifteen, cain't, seem lak, to

save me. Man must have answer wrong. Six go into fo'teen, three, no, two times and—two over. [*His voice dies away as he becomes lost in his work. Presently his face begins to light up. He figures faster. Suddenly he slaps his knee.*] Dere whah I been missing it all de time. I carried two 'stid o' one. Blame fool I is. [*He hits the side of his head with his knuckle. In his excitement he calls out.*] Puny, I gitting dat answer. [*But* PUNY *is snoring away. In a moment he throws down his book with beaming face.*] I got it, folkses, I got it. Fifteen! Dat white man know whut he doing, he all time git dem answer right. [*He turns expectantly towards* LIJE.] I got it Lije. [LIJE *makes no answer. He turns towards* PUNY *again, starts to speak but sees he is asleep.*] Bud! [*But* BUD *makes no answer. The heavy breathing of the sleepers falls regularly upon his ears. His face sinks into a sort of hopeless brooding.*] Yeh, sleep, sleep, sleep yo' life away. I figger foh you, foh me, foh all de black in de world to lead 'em up out'n ignorance. Dey don't listen, dey don't heah me, dey in de wilderness, don't wanta be led. Dey sleep, sleep in bondage. [*He bows his head between his knees.*] Sleep in sin. [*Presently.*] Time me to eat.

He reaches for his bucket and is about to open it when PUNY *springs high into the air with a squeak of terror, and begins rolling over and over in the leaves and briars.*

PUNY—Come heah, folkses, come heah git dis thing off'n me.

He clutches at his breeches. LIJE *and* BUD *start up out of their sleep.*

LIJE—Who dat run-mad man?

BUD—Dat damn Puny, sump'n in he britches!

ABE—Be still, Puny, I git it out. [*He goes up to the frightened* PUNY, *reaches down his trousers and pulls out a mouse.*] Nothing but a little bitty old field mice.

He throws the mouse into the thicket. LIJE *and* BUD *break into roaring laughter.* PUNY *sits down exhausted, fanning himself angrily.*

PUNY—Laugh, laugh, all o' you. Dat thing bite same as mud turkle. Yeh, funny, funny, lak hell to you.

He snaps his mouth closed and fans himself the more furiously. A loud shout comes from off the left.

ABE—Stop yo' laughing, I heah somebody hollering.

A second halloo comes down the hill.

PUNY—Dat de Colonel and Mr. Lonnie!

BUD—Sound lak 'em. Da's who 'tis.

ABE—[*Going off at the left.*] Heah we is, Colonel Mack, at de spring eating dinner! [*He comes back.*] Col. Mack and Mr. Lonnie coming on down heah.

PUNY—Co'se. Gut to see how many boxes us cleaned up dis mawning.

ABE—He tell me 'bout de school now. [*He stirs around him in his excitement.*] Mebbe dat his main business heah in de middle o' de day.

BUD—Hunh, mebbe. Gut some special work want done. Wanter hurry us to it, dat's whut.

The sound of voices is heard approaching from the left, and almost immediately the COLONEL *and his son* LONNIE *come in. The* COLONEL *carries a riding whip. He is a stout, run-down old Southerner with all the signs of moral and intellectual decadence upon him. Lechery, whiskey, and levity of living have taken their toll of him, and yet he has retained a kind of native good-naturedness. His shirt front and once pointed beard are stained with the drippings of tobacco juice. There is something in his bearing and in the contour of his face that resembles* ABE. *His son, a heavyish florid young man of twenty-three or four, walks behind him.*

COLONEL—[*In a high jerky voice.*] Snoozing, hanh?

ABE—Just finishing our dinner, suh.

PUNY—Us 'bout to wuk over-time to-day, Colonel.

COLONEL—Not likely, I reckon. Say, I want you fellows, all four of you, to get over to the swamp piece on Dry Creek. Boxes there are running over, two quarts in 'em apiece, prime virgin. [*They begin to move to their feet.*] No, I don't mean to go right now. Gabe's coming by on the big road here [*Jerking*

his whip towards the rear.] with a load of barrels and the dippers in about a half-hour. Meet him out there.

LONNIE—Yeh, we want to git the wagons off to Fayetteville to-night.

COLONEL—How you get on cornering this morning, Bud?

BUD—Purty good, suh. Us fo' done 'bout all dat pastuh piece, suh.

COLONEL—Fine, fine. That's the way. Puny and Lije stay with you?

BUD—Raght dere eve'y jump.

LIJE—Yessuh, yessuh!

PUNY—When he gi' de call we gi' 'im de 'sponse eve'y time, suh. Yes, suh, us kept 'im crowded.

COLONEL—We got to git on, Lonnie. Want to see how the scrape's coming over on Uncle Joe's Branch. Be up on the road there in half a' hour.

LONNIE—[*Stopping as they go out.*] Got so you doing any better work lately, Abe?

ABE—[*Starting.*] Suh!

LONNIE—You heard me.

ABE—I didn't understand you, Mr. Lonnie.

LONNIE—You understood me all right. [*Pointing to the book on the ground.*] Let them damned books worry you still?

COLONEL—Come on, Lonnie.

ABE—[*Stammering.*] I dunno—I——

COLONEL—Still holding out on short rations, ain't you, Abe?

There is the least hint of pride in the COLONEL'S *voice.*

ABE—[*Somewhat confused.*] I studying whut I kin, slow go, slow go.

COLONEL—Stick to it. You the first nigger I ever see so determined. But then you're uncommon! [*The* COLONEL *moves on.*] Come on, Lonnie.

ABE—[*Following somewhat timidly after him.*] Colonel Mack, did di—you—what'd dey say over dere 'bout that little school business?

COLONEL—Bless my soul, 'bout to forgit it. I talked it over with the board and most of 'em think maybe we'd better not try it yet.

ABE—[*His face falling.*] When dey say it might be a good time? I gitting right 'long wid dat 'rithmetic and spelling and reading. I kin teach de colored boys and gals a whole heap right now, and I'll keep studying.

COLONEL—[*Impatiently.*] Oh, I dunno. Time'll come mebbe. Mebbe time won't come. Folks is quare things y' know.

He moves on.

ABE—Cain't you git 'em to let me try it awhile? Reckon——

COLONEL—I don't know, I tell you. Got my business on my mind now.

LONNIE—He's done told you two or three times, can't you hear?

ABE—[*His eyes flashing and his voice shaking with sudden uncontrollable anger.*] Yeh, yeh, I hear 'im. Dem white folks don't keer—dey——

LONNIE—[*Stepping before him.*] Look out! none of your sass. Pa's already done more for you than you deserve. He even stood up for you and they laughing at him there in town.

ABE—[*Trembling.*] Yeh, yeh, I knows. But dem white folks don't think—I going to show 'em, I——

LONNIE—[*Pushing himself before him.*] Dry up. Not another word.

ABE—[*His voice breaking almost into a sob.*] Don't talk to me lak dat, Mr. Lonnie. Stop him, Colonel Mack, 'fore I hurt him.

The other Negroes draw off into a knot by the pine tree, mumbling in excitement and fear.

COLONEL—Stop, Lonnie! Abe, don't you talk to my son like that.

LONNIE—By God, I'm going to take some of the airs off'n him right now. You've gone around here

getting sorrier and more worthless every day for the last year. What you need is a good beating, and I'm gonna give it to you.

He steps backwards and snatches the whip from his father's hand.

COLONEL—Stop that, Lonnie!

LONNIE—Keep out of this yourself. [*He comes towards* ABE.] I'll beat his black hide off'n him.

ABE—Keep 'im back dere, Colonel Mack. I mought kill him! Keep 'im off.

LONNIE—Kill him! All right, do it. There, damn you!

He strikes ABE *across the face with his whip. With a snarl* ABE *springs upon him, tears the whip from his hands and hurls him headlong into the thicket of briars and bushes. Then he stands with his hands and head hanging down, his body shaking like one with the palsy.*

PUNY—[*Screaming.*] You done kilt Mr. Lonnie! Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy!

COLONEL—[*Running to* LONNIE *who is crawling up out of the mud with his clothes and skin torn. He is sobbing and cursing.*] Are you hurt? How bad are you hurt?

LONNIE—Let me git at that son of a bitch and I'll kill him dead. [*Moaning.*] Oh, I'll beat his brains out with one o' them axes.

COLONEL—If you ain't dead, you'd better keep your hands off'n him. I'll fix him. [*He reaches down and picks up the whip. Thundering.*] Git down on your knees, Abe! Git down, you slave! I'm gonna beat you.

ABE *jerks his head up in defiance, but before the stern face of the Colonel his strength goes out of him. He puts his hands up in supplication.*

ABE—Don't beat me, Colonel Mack, don't beat me wid dat whip!

COLONEL—Git down on your knees! I've beat many a slave, and I'll show you how it feels.

He strikes him several blows.

ABE—[*Falling on his knees.*] Oh, Lawd, have muhcy upon me!

The COLONEL *begins to beat him blow upon blow.* PUNY, BUD *and* LIJE *stand near the pine in breathless anxiety.*

PUNY—De Colonel'll kill 'im!

BUD—[*Seizing his arm.*] Shet dat mouf, nigger!

COLONEL—[*As he brings the whip down.*] Let this be a lesson to you to the end of your life!

ABE—[*His back twitching under the whip, his voice broken.*] Muhcy, Colonel Mack, muhcy!

COLONEL—You struck a white man, you struck my son.

ABE—[*Raising his tear-stained face.*] I yo' son too, you my daddy.

He throws himself down before him, embracing his feet. The COLONEL *lowers the whip, then drops it behind him.*

LONNIE—[*His voice husky with rage.*] You hear what he say? Hear what he called you?

He seizes the whip and in a blind rage strikes the prostrate ABE *again and again.*

COLONEL—[*Stepping between them.*] Stop it! Give me that whip. [LONNIE *nervelessly hesitates and then reluctantly hands him the whip.*] Go on back out to the road and wait for me. Trot! [LONNIE *in disgust and rage finally goes off at the left nursing his face and his arms.*] Get up, Abe. Get up, I say.

ABE *sits up, hugging his face between his knees. The* COLONEL *wets his handkerchief in the spring, and with his hands on* ABE'S *head bathes the bruises on his neck and shoulders.*

ABE—[*In a voice grown strangely dignified and quiet.*] Thank 'ee, thank 'ee, Colonel Mack.

COLONEL—[*Breathing heavily.*] Thanky nothing. I had to beat you, Abe, had to. Think no more about it. Dangerous thing, hitting a white man. But this is the end of it. Won't be no law, nothing but this. Put

some tar and honey on yourself to-night and you'll be all right to-morrow. [*The bushes are suddenly parted at the rear and a tall sinuous young mulatto woman bounds through. She carries a bucket in her hand. At the sight of the* COLONEL *bathing* ABE'S *head and neck she rushes forward with a low cry. The* COLONEL *turns towards her.*] Now, Goldie, ain't no use cutting up. Abe been in a little trouble. Nothing much.

GOLDIE—[*Moaning.*] I heahd de racket and I 'fraid somebody being kilt. Is you hurt bad, Abe, honey babe? [*She bends tenderly over him, her hand running over his hair.*] Who huht you, honey, who huht you?

COLONEL—[*Handing* GOLDIE *his handkerchief.*] Look after him, Goldie. [*He goes out at the left calling.*] Wait a minute, Lonnie!

GOLDIE—Whut dey do to you, Abe? Who huht you? [*All the time she is rubbing his neck, dabbing his shoulders with the handkerchief, and cooing over him.*] Why'n you kill dem white mens if dey hurt you? You kin do it, break 'em lak broomstraws.

ABE—[*Standing up.*] Ain't nobody hurt me. I crazy dat's whut, crazy in de haid. Ain't nobody hurt me.

GOLDIE—[*Clinging to him.*] You is hurt, hurt bad. Look at yo' po' neck and shoulders. Look at 'em beat wid great whales on 'em!

ABE—[*Growling.*] Ain't nobody hurt me, I tell you.

GOLDIE—Lay yo'se'f down heah and let me smoove off yo' forehead and put some cold water on dat mark crost yo' face. Please'm, Abe.

ABE—[*Suddenly crying out in a loud voice.*] I ain't nothing, nothing. Dat white man beat me, beat me like a dawg. [*His voice rising into a wail.*] He flail me lak a suck-egg dawg! [*He rocks his head from side to side in a frenzy of wrath.*] Lemme git to him! [*He falls on his knees searching in the leaves and finds a stone.* GOLDIE *stands wringing her hands and moaning. He jumps to his feet, raising the stone high above his head.*] Lemme git to him, I scrush his God-damn head lak a egg shell!

He moves to the left to follow the COLONEL. GOLDIE *throws her arms around his neck.*

GOLDIE—No, no, you ain't gwine out dere, Abe, Abe!

PUNY—[*Crying out.*] Stop him, Bud! Lije, keep him back!

LIJE—[*Coming from the pine tree.*] Hyuh, now you, Abe, stop dat.

BUD—[*Moving quickly before him and blocking his path.*] Stop dat, fool. You gwine fix it to git yo'se'f hung up on a telegram pole. Body be so full o' holes, sift sand.

GOLDIE—[*Sobbing.*] Don't do it, Abe, sugar babe.

She throws herself upon his breast.

BUD—[*Reaching toward her.*] Seem lak you take yo'se'f off'n dat man!

ABE—[*Pulling her arms from around him.*] Lemme loose, lemme loose. [*After a moment he throws the stone down.*] I ain't going do nothing.

He sits down on the log at the left, holding his head in his hands.

GOLDIE—[*Bringing her bucket.*] Hyuh, eat sump'n, Abe, you feel better. I gut some pie and some cake in heah foh you.

PUNY—[*Stepping back and forth in senseless excitement.*] Somebody gwine git kilt at dis mess, somebody——

ABE—[*Pushing* GOLDIE *away.*] I ain't want nothing t' eat, ain't hongry.

LIJE—Bedder eat, Abe. Git yo' stren'th back.

ABE—[*Savagely.*] Ain't hongry, I keep telling you.

GOLDIE *drops on her knees beside him and laying her head in his lap clasps her arms around him.*

GOLDIE—[*Sobbing softly.*] Oh, boy, boy, why dey beat you up so? Whut you do to 'em?

ABE—Fool, fool I is. Crazy, dat's it.

BUD—[*Sharply.*] He g'in Mr. Lonnie and de

Colonel back talk. Cain't sass white mens and git 'way wid it. Abe orter know better.

LIJE *wanders over to the right blowing his harp softly and forlornly.*

PUNY—[*Sitting down on the ground.*] Cain't be done, Abe. Cain't.

BUD—[*Stripping leaves from a bush and watching* GOLDIE *as she carries on over* ABE.] Hyuh, 'oman, stop dat rairing. [*Muttering to himself.*] Nevah see two bigger fools.

ABE *puts his hands mechanically on* GOLDIE'S *shoulders and begins stroking her.*

ABE—Stop it, baby. Ain't no use to cry.

PUNY *sits with his mouth open in astonishment watching them.* LIJE *lays himself back on the ground and blows his harp, apparently no longer interested.*

BUD—[*Jealousy rising within him.*] Heigh, Goldie, git up from dat man's lap. He ain't keer nothing foh you. [GOLDIE'S *sobs die away and she is quiet.*] He say you foolish many time. He look down on you.

GOLDIE—[*Raising her tear-stained face.*] How you know? You jealous, Bud Gaskins. He better man dan you. Wuth whole town of you. [*Catching* ABE *by the hand and picking up her bucket.*] Come on, come on, honey, le's go off dere in de woods and eat our dinner by ourse'ves!

BUD—[*Coming up to her.*] Hyuh, you stay out'n dat woods wid him, nigger.

ABE—[*Standing up.*] Yeh, yeh, I come wid you.

He moves as one in a dream, and reaches out and pushes BUD *behind him.*

GOLDIE—[*Her face alight, a sort of reckless and unreal abandonment upon her.*] I knows where dere's a cool place under a big tree. And dey's cool green moss dere and soft leaves. Le's go dere, boy. I gwine tend to you and feed you. [*She moves across towards the right, leading* ABE *like a child.*] We make us a bed dere, honey. [LIJE *sits up watching them.*] Us forgit de 'membrance o' all dis trouble. [*A kind of ecstasy breaking in her voice.*] Dere de birds sing and we hear de little branch running over de rocks. Cool dere, sweet dere, you kin sleep, honey, rest dere, baby. Yo' mammy, yo' chile gwine love you, make you fohgit.

ABE—[*Moved out of himself.*] Yeh, yeh, I come wid you. I don't keer foh nothing, not nothing no mo'. You, des' you'n me.

GOLDIE—Ain't no worl', ain't no Lije and Bud, nobody. Us gwine make us a 'biding place and a pillah under dat green tree. [*In sweet oblivion.*] Feel yo' arms around me, my lips on yo'n. We go singing up to heaben, honey, togedder—togedder.

They go off, her voice gradually dying away like a nun's chant.

BUD—[*Breaking a sapling in his grasp.*] Gwine off, gwine off in de woods togedder dere lak hawgs.

PUNY—[*Bounding up, his body shaking in lascivious delight.*] I gwine watch 'em—hee-hee—I gwine watch 'em.

LIJE—[*Knocking him back.*] Bedder stay out'n dat woods. Abe kill you.

PUNY—[*Standing up by the pine tree.*] Kin see 'em, her still a-leading 'im.

LIJE—[*Standing up and peering off to the right.*] Dere on de cool moss and de sof' green leaves.

BUD—[*Stripping the limbs from the top of the broken sapling.*] Ain't gwine look. Dey fools, bofe fools. [*Raging out.*] Dere she go playing de hawg. Didn't know she lak dat. [*He sucks in his breath with the sound of eating something.*] Wisht to Gohd I knowed she lak dat. I de man foh her. Bud Gaskins. I tame her, Gohd damn her, I tame her down and take dat speerit out'n her.

He crowds out his chest and walks up and down.

PUNY—[*Grasping* LIJE'S *arm.*] Cain't hardly see 'em no mo', kin you?

LIJE—Kin hardly.

BUD—[*His anger and jealousy disappearing in physical emotion and vulgar curiosity.*] Whah dey now?

LIJE—[*Pointing.*] Dere, dere, dey crossing de branch now.

PUNY—[*Breathlessly.*] I see 'em. I see 'em. He arm 'round her now, her head on he shoulder. [*He capers in his excitement.*] Lawd! Lawd!

BUD—[*With a loud brutal laugh as he slaps* LIJE *on the back.*] On de sof' green moss.

LIJE—[*Laughing back and dragging his harp across his mouth.*] Whah de leaves is cool.

PUNY—Cain't see 'em no mo'. [*He whirls about and turns a handspring.*] Whoopee, folkses! Gwine run away wid myse'f!

BUD—[*His eyes shining.*] Down whah de branch water run.

He shuffles a jig among the leaves.

LIJE—[*Blowing upon his harp.*] Singing raght up to heaben!

He plays more wildly as they all drop into a barbaric dance that gradually mounts into a dionysiac frenzy.

PUNY—Heaben!

BUD—Jesus, Lawd, Fadder and Son!

LIJE—[*Singing loudly as they dance, the music running into a quick thumping rhythm.*]

My feets wuh wet wid de sunrise dew,
De mawning stah wuh a witness too.
'Way, 'way up in de Rock of Ages,
In God's bosom gwine be my pillow.

They gambol, turn and twist, run on all fours, rear themselves up on their haunches, cavort like goats.

PUNY—In God's bosom—hanh!

BUD—In who bosom?

LIJE—In who bosom, bubber!

A loud halloo comes down from the hill in the rear, unnoticed by them.

PUNY—In Goldie's bosom. Hee-hee-hee.

BUD and LIJE—Haw-haw-haw! Hee-hee-hee! In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

The halloo is repeated.

LIJE—Hyuh, dere dat Gabe calling us. Better git, or de Colonel have dat stick on our back.

They gather up their buckets and axes. PUNY *clambers up the pine a few feet and drops to the ground.*

BUD—Kin see?

PUNY—See nothing. Hee-hee!

LIJE—Gut to leave 'em now. Abe ketch it 'gin don't mind out. He not coming wid us.

BUD—He done foh now. Dat gal gut him hard and fast. [*Snorting scornfully.*] Books, books! Rise 'em up, lak hell!

LIJE—I done told you. Heart say dis, head say dat. Bad mixtry. Bad. Crazy!

PUNY—[*Shouting.*] Heigh, you Gabe! Coming! [*They move out at the rear up the hill, singing, laughing and jostling each other.*]

> 'Way, 'way down by de sweet branch water
> In her bosom gwine be he pillah!

Hee-hee—haw—haw—!

Their loud brutally mocking laughter floats back behind them.

SCENE 2

A SPRING *day about three years later, in Abraham McCranie's two-room cabin. The room is roughly built of framed material and unceiled. To the right front is a fireplace with a green oakwood fire going. A wood box is to the right of the chimney. To the left rear of the room is a bed, and at the left center rear a door leads out to the porch! To the right of the door a window gives a view of wide-stretched cotton fields. Below the window close to the wall is a rough home-made chest with several books on it, and hanging between it and the door is a sort of calendar, with the illustration of a slave leaving his chains behind and walking up a hill towards the sunrise. There is a caption at the top of the print in large letters*—"WE ARE RISING." *Several old dresses, bonnets, and coats hang on the nails in the joists in the right rear. A door in the right center leads into the kitchen. At the left front is a dilapidated old bureau, small pieces of wood taking the place of lost casters. The top drawer is open, sagging down like a wide lip, with stray bits of clothing hanging over the edge. A bucket of water and a pan are on the bureau. There are several splint-bottomed chairs and a rocker in the room.*

When the curtain rises MUH MACK *is sitting by*

the fire rocking a bundle in her arms. She is a chocolate-colored Negress of near sixty, dressed in a long dirty wrapper, and barefooted. Her graying hair is wrapped in pigtails and stands around her head Medusa-like. A long snuff-stick protrudes from her mouth, and now and then the fire sputters with a frying noise as she spits into it. GOLDIE'S *long gaunt form lies stretched on the bed at the left partly covered by a sheet, her head hanging off on her arm. She is constantly raising in her languid hand a stick with a paper tied to it to shoo away the flies.* MUH MACK *rocks and sings.*

MUH MACK—

Oohm—oohm—hoonh—oohm—oohm—
Dis heah baby de pu'tiest baby,
Pu'tiest baby in de lan'.
He gwine grow up champeen sojer,
Mammy's honey, onlies' man.
Oohm—oohm—hoonh—oohm—oohm—

GOLDIE—[*In a tired voice.*] How he coming now?

MUH MACK—[*Shaking her finger and wagging her head at the bundle.*] Done seen um grow. Look at me lak he know me.

GOLDIE—[*With a long sigh.*] I so tiahed, tiahed. Seem lak I kin sleep forever.

MUH MACK—Lie and sleep, sleep. Git yo' stren'th.

GOLDIE—I tiahed but cain't sleep. [*She lapses into silence. The old woman rocks and sings. Presently* GOLDIE *raises her head.*] Whut day to-day?

MUH MACK—Sa'd'y.

GOLDIE—Seem lak I cain't 'member nothing. Whut day he come?

MUH MACK—He come a-Chuesday.

GOLDIE—Dat make him—le's see, how old?

MUH MACK—Fo' day now.

GOLDIE—[*Suddenly sitting up with a gasp.*] Dem udder two die, one th'ee days, udder'n fo'.

MUH MACK—Nanh—nanh, lie back down. Dis heah baby live be a hundred. He strong, he muscled. Dem udder po' little 'uns puny, bawn to die. De mark was on 'em f'om de fust.

GOLDIE—[*Bending her head between her knees and weeping softly.*] Dey was so pitiful and liddle. I cain't fohgit how dey feel and fumble foh me wid deir liddle hands and dey hongry.

MUH MACK—[*Irritably.*] Bless Gohd, crying adder dem, and gut dis fine 'un heah. Lay yo'se'f down on dat bed and res'.

GOLDIE—Cain't fohgit 'em, cain't.

MUH MACK—Hunh, mought as well and dey done plowed in de ground.

GOLDIE—[*Her tears beginning to flow again.*] Yeh, yeh, dey is! Abe didn't try to keep Mr. Lonnie f'om cutting down dem plum bushes and plowing up dat hedgerow. I hold it a'gin him long as I live.

MUH MACK—Why foh? De dead's de dead. Let de earf hab 'em. Let cotton grow over 'um. No use mo'ning. Think on de living.

GOLDIE—Po' Abe, 'on't his fault dough. He proud, stand by see white mens plow over 'em, say nothin', 'on't beg foh his babies.

MUH MACK—Cain't blame 'im! He stiff neck. God break his spirit. Gi' 'im two dead 'uns to fetch 'im down. He bedder humble now. [*Talking half to herself.*] He talk proud lak, gwine raise up big son, leader 'mong men. Fust 'un come thin, liddle lak rat. He hate 'im. He die. God call 'im. Second come, Ol' Moster keep him liddle, thin. He die too. Abe gitting down to sackcloff and ashes. God see him down crying foh muhcy, He send dis 'un, strong. Israel man. He gwine flourish, he gwine wax.

GOLDIE—[*Stretching herself out on the bed.*] Abe say dis 'un gwine die too, same lak de udders. He don't look at 'im, pay no 'tention.

MUH MACK—Hunh, he will dough when he see 'im fleshen up wid he sucking.

GOLDIE—Whah he?

MUH MACK—Went down in de new ground

planting cawn. Won't make nothing dough and it de light o' de moon. He be heah directly foh he dinner.

GOLDIE—Po' Abe wuk too hard.

MUH MACK—[*Snorting.*] Wuk too hahd de mischief! Ain't wuk whut ail him. He studyin' ol' books and mess too much. Crap shows it.

GOLDIE—He don't look well, neiver.

MUH MACK—Cain't look well and worry all time. [*A step is heard on the porch.*] Dere he now. Take dis baby. Gut to put dinner on de table.

She takes the baby over to GOLDIE, *lays it by her side, goes out at the right, and is heard rattling dishes and pans in the kitchen.*

GOLDIE—[*Crooning over her baby.*] Now you go sleep, res' yo'se'f, git strong and grow gre't big.

ABE *comes in at the rear carrying a hoe and a file. He is barefooted and dressed in overalls, ragged shirt and weather-stained straw hat. Sitting down near the center of the room, he begins filing his hoe.*

ABE—[*Without looking around.*] How you come on?

GOLDIE—Better, I reckon. [*With a sharp gasp.*] Hyuh, why you fetch dat hoe in de house?

ABE—[*Paying no attention to her query.*] Baby still living, hunh?

GOLDIE—Abe, take dat hoe out'n dis house. Mought bring bad luck on you. [*Raising herself up in bed.*] Mought bring sump'n on de baby.

ABE—Cain't swub dem new-ground bushes wid no dull hoe.

GOLDIE—[*Pleading.*] Take it out'n de house, I say.

ABE—When I damn ready.

GOLDIE—[*Calling.*] Muh Mack! Muh Mack!

MUH MACK—[*Coming to the door at the right.*] Whut ails you? [*She sees* ABE *filing his hoe.*] Lawd he'p us! Throw dat thing out, throw it out! Ain't gut no sense. Goldie too weak to be worried up.

ABE—Aw right den. I finish wid it now. Set o' fools. Eve'ything got a sign 'tached to it. Ign'ant, bline!

He throws the hoe out through the rear door and gets a book from the chest and begins reading.

MUH MACK—Back at dem books, Lawd, never see sich.

She goes scornfully back to the kitchen.

ABE—[*Half growling.*] Says heah niggers gut to git out'n dem 'spicions and being 'fraid. Ain't no signs wid evil and good in 'em. I read dat last night. [*Reading and halting over the words.*] "The Negro is a superstitious person. There are signs and wonders

in the weather, some fraught with evil, some with good. He plants his crops according to the moon, works and labors under the eye of some evil spirit of his own imagining." [*Closing the book with a bang.*] Heah dat?

GOLDIE—I heah but don't mind it. Mean nothing. White man wrote it, and he don't know.

ABE—Dat's jest it; he do know. Nigger one don't know. Dat book wrote foh you, Muh, and all de rest of de bline.

GOLDIE—Put up dem ol' books. Seem lak you keer mo' foh 'em dan you do dis heah baby, and he a fine boy chile.

ABE—[*Throwing the book back on the chest.*] What he nohow? Ain't 'rested in 'im. Ain't no use being. He be dead in week. God done cuss me and my household. No luck at nothing. Cain't raise chillun, cain't raise crap, nothing. Ain't dry weather, wet. Ain't wet, dry. Heah May month and cold 'nough foh freeze. [*He stretches his feet to the fire.*] De damn crows down dere on de creek pulling up my cawn faster'n I kin plant it. [*He rocks his head.*] Jesus!

GOLDIE—[*Pleading.*] Abe, honey, don't git down. Things coming better now. Dis boy gwine make you feel better. Heah he lie now des' smiling lak he onderstand me. [*Bending over the baby.*] Yeh you is gwine grow up and take trouble off'n yo' po' daddy. Yeh, you is.

ABE—[*Holding his head in his arms.*] Listen to dat talk, listen dere. [*Bitterly.*] 'Oman know. She know. Heah I am wid no money to buy me shoes. [*Holding up his dust-stained foot.*] Dere you is, foot, cut wid glass, full o' b'rars, wo' out stumping de roots and snags, and I cain't buy nothing to kiver you wid.

GOLDIE—De Colonel give you shoes, you ax him.

ABE—Ain't gwine ax him nothing, not nothing. [*Suddenly clenching his fist and hitting his thigh.*] Dat man beat me, beat me at de spring th'ee yeah ago, I ain't fohgit. [*He gets up and strides over to the bed and looks down at the suckling infant.*] Dere you lie drinking yo' grub in. Whut you keer? Nothing.

He lays his hand roughly on the baby and pinches him. The child lets out a high thin wail.

GOLDIE—[*Beating his hand off.*] Quit dat pinching dat baby. Quit it!

ABE—[*Laughing brutally as he walks up and down the floor.*] Yeh, you fight over 'im now and he be plowed in de ground lak de udders in a month. Heehee! Ain't dis a hell of a mess! It sho' God is. And us ain't got 'nough to feed a cat. You'n Muh cook and slay and waste fast I make it. Note at de sto' done tuck up, crap done all mortgaged up 'head o' time. Cain't make ends meet, cain't. [*Throwing his hands out hopelessly.*] I ain't no farmer.

GOLDIE—[*Wretchedly.*] Oh, Abe, we git on

somehow, us will. And Muh'n me don't waste. I be up wid you in de fields by de middle o' de week. Po' chile, you need sleep, need rest.

ABE—Make no difference. Wuk our guts out do no good. I tell you, gal, de Nigger is down, down. De white man up dere high, setting up wid God, up dere in his favor. He git eve'ything, nigger git de scraps, leavings. [*Flaring out.*] Ain't no God foh de nigger, dat's white man's God. Dat come to me down in de new ground.

He sits down again, tapping his feet on the floor.

GOLDIE—[*Wiping her eyes.*] Honey, you gut to stop talking lak dat. Cain't be bad luck allus. I'se 'feared when you talk dat wild talk. God heah it he do. [MUH MACK *comes and stands in the door.*] He mought be doing all dis to make us good, make us humble down befo' him.

ABE—Humble down, hell! Look at de udder niggers den. Dey shout and carry on in de church, pray and pay de preachers in deir blindness. Dey humble. What do God do? Starve 'em to deaf. Kill 'em off lak flies wid consumption. Dey dying 'long de river same as de chillun in de wilderness.

MUH MACK—You blaspheaming, da's whut you doing. No wonder Gohd take yo' babies 'way, no wonder he make yo' mule die, blast down yo' plans and send de crows and cold weather and root lice to destroy yo' craps. [*Her eyes flashing.*] You gut to

change yo' ways. Some day he gwine re'ch down from de clouds and grab you by de scruff o' de neck and break you cross he knee. He gi'n you fine baby chile, you don't thank him. You gut to fall down, pray, git low, git humble. [*Her voice rises into a semi-chant.*] You dere, Jesus, heah my prayer. Dis heah sinner, he weeked, he blaspheam. Save him and save dis po' liddle baby.

GOLDIE—[*Weeping over the child.*] Do, Lawd, heah our prayer.

ABE *sits down in his chair and stares moodily into the fire.*

MUH MACK—[*Crying out.*] Dem dere ol' books cause it, da's whut. Burn um up, burn um wid fiah. Yo' wild talk gwine make de Upper Powers drap lightning on dis house, gwine destroy all of us. [*She wraps her arms before her, mumbling and swaying from side to side. Suddenly she raises her head and striding over to the chest shakes her fist at the books and kicks them.*] You de trouble. I hates de sight o' you, and I wish dere wa'n't nary one o' you in de worl'.

ABE—[*Throwing her back.*] Look out 'oman! Don't you tech my books!

MUH MACK—You mash my arm!

With a wail she goes out at the right and is heard sobbing in the kitchen.

GOLDIE—Oh, you struck huh! Abe—Abe——

She sits up in the bed rocking the baby and quieting him. A heavy step sounds on the porch. ABE *sits before the fire smoothing out the leaves of a book, as a voice calls from the outside.*

VOICE—Heigh, you, Abe!

GOLDIE—[*Quickly.*] Dat de Colonel out dere, Abe.

ABE—[*Going to the door.*] Yes, suh, dat you, Colonel Mack?

COLONEL—[*Coming in.*] Yes. How you come on, all of you? [*He looks around the room and at the bed. Three years have worked a great change in him. He is stouter, his face mottled, and he walks with difficulty, propped on a stick.*] Been wanting to see that fine baby, Abe.

ABE—[*Quietly.*] Yes, suh, yes, suh.

MUH MACK—[*Coming in.*] And he sho' is a fine 'un. [*Standing near the* COLONEL.] Fine and strong same lak Abe when he wuh bawn.

COLONEL—What's the matter, Goldie? Ain't been fighting, have you all? Who was that making a racket in here?

GOLDIE—[*Keeping her head lowered.*] I all right, Colonel Mack.

MUH MACK—[*Wiping her eyes.*] Ain't no row, Colonel. Want you to 'suade dat Abe git rid o' dem

ol' books. 'Nough trouble come on us 'count of um.

COLONEL—[*Laughing.*] The devil, let him keep his books. He's the only nigger in the whole country worth a durn. Let me see the baby. [GOLDIE *shows the baby.*] That's a fine un, Abe. He'll live. Let me feel him. [*Holding him up.*] Heavy, gracious!

MUH MACK *looks at him intently and there is the vaguest touch of malice in her voice as she speaks.*

MUH MACK—Lawd, it all comes to me ag'in. Jest sech a day as dis thirty yeah ago you come down heah and hold Abe up dat-a-way.

COLONEL—[*Looking through the window a long while.*] Time hurries on, it goes by in a hurry. [ABE *looks before him with an indefinable expression on his face. A constrained silence comes over them and the* COLONEL *takes a sort of refuge in gazing intently at the child. Once or twice he clears his throat.*] Yes, Callie, we're getting old.

For an instant all differences are passed away and they are four human beings aware of the strangeness of their lives, conscious of what queer relationships have fastened them together.

MUH MACK—[*Starting.*] Yes, suh, we ain't gut much longer.

Then the baby begins to cry and the COLONEL *smiles.*

COLONEL—Here, take him, Goldie. Favors Muh Mack, don't favor you, Abe.

ABE—Yes, suh.

COLONEL—[*Drawing a heavy, folded paper from his pocket slowly and with weighty dignity.*] I got a little surprise for you'n Goldie, Abe. [*He puts on his spectacles, opens the paper and starts to read.*] "Whereas"—[*He stops as if convulsed with pain, and presently goes on.*] "I devise to Abraham McCranie a house and tract of land containing twenty-five acres and formerly known as the 'Howington place,' to him and his heirs forever." [*Hesitating a moment and folding the paper together.*] Then follows a description of the place in course and distance, Abe, which I won't read. It's all signed up and recorded in the court-house.

He feels around him heavily for his stick.

ABE—[*Incredulously.*] Whut dat? Dat foh me?

COLONEL—Yes, for you. A deed to this house and twenty-five acres of land, yours.

He holds out the paper to ABE.

ABE—[*Taking it with trembling hands.*] Lawd, Colonel Mack, whut I gwine say?

COLONEL—Say nothing. Say thanky if you want to.

ABE—[*Overcome.*] Thanky, suh, thanky, suh.

COLONEL—Shake hands on it, Abe.

ABE—[*Wiping his hand on his coat.*] Thanky, suh.

The COLONEL *looks at his bent head with strange intentness, and then drops* ABE'S *hand.*

GOLDIE—Oh, Colonel Mack!

Her eyes are shining with thankfulness.

MUH MACK—Abe, you's gut land, boy, you owns you a piece o' land, Glory!

She runs up to the COLONEL *and covers his hands with kisses.*

COLONEL—[*Waving her off.*] Nothing, nothing to do for him. He deserves it. [*Looking straight at* ABE.] You do, boy. I want to see you go forward now. You had a hard time the last three years.

GOLDIE—He has, po' boy. He had it hard since de day he married me.

COLONEL—Hunh. He couldn't a done better nowhere. I know. [*The* COLONEL *picks up his stick which he has laid across the bed.*] Well, I got to move on. [*He stops near the door.*] And, Abe, how's your book business coming on?

ABE—I—I studying and reading now and den. Most too tiahed every night dough to do much.

COLONEL—Don't give up like Lonnie. Sent him to school, and sent him to school, even tried him at

the university, won't stay. He ain't worth a damn, that's what. [*Turning towards the door and stopping again.*] Well, I've got another little surprise for you in celebration of that fine boy.

He looks down and taps on the floor.

ABE—[*Excitedly.*] Whut is it, Colonel Mack, suh?

COLONEL—How'd you like to try your hand at teaching a little school next fall?

MUH MACK *throws up her hands.*

GOLDIE—[*Breathlessly.*] Oh, me!

ABE—[*In confusion.*] Teach school? Yessuh, I——

COLONEL—I'm going to have that old Quillie House fixed up and put some benches in it and a blackboard. I'll get two Negroes to serve with me on the school board and we'll try you out. [*Smiling queerly.*] I been reading your books, too, Abe.

ABE—[*With a great breath.*] I gwine teach school —at last!

COLONEL—[*Going shakily out at the door.*] Yes, at last. Now don't forget your crop, Abe, and study yourself to death.

ABE—[*Following him.*] Colonel Mack, you, you— I—I——

COLONEL—Take care of that baby. Raise him up right. And, Abe, don't forget you ain't gonna have

no easy time. I'll get a lot of cussing for this, well as you. Go on eat your dinner. [*He stops on the porch and calls.*] Here, Goldie, take this fifty cents and buy the boy a stick of candy. [*He steps to the door and throws the coin on the bed.*] Take care of him and don't kill him on collards and beans.

He goes off.

ABE—[*Calling after him.*] I ain't, Colonel, I gwine raise him. I gwine make a man—— [*He stops and stands watching the old man going in the lane. Then he turns and stumbles into the room with shining face.*] I—I fohgives him all. I don't 'member dat beating by de spring no mo'.

GOLDIE—[*Reaching out from the bed and grasping his hand.*] Oh, honey babe, our troubles's ended. We gwine—we gwine have 'nough t' eat and you gwine be happy.

She turns over in the bed and begins to cry softly.

ABE—[*Patting her shoulders.*] Dere, dere, don't you cry, chile. [*He wipes his eyes with his sleeve.*] I been mean man. [*In a husky voice.*] I treat my gal mean, blaspheam 'gin de Lawd. I gwine do better, I——

A sob chokes in his throat.

MUH MACK—[*Coming up to him and clasping her arms around him.*] Bless de Lawd, you gwine do bedder now.

She sits down in a chair and bows her head in her lap.

GOLDIE—He good man, de Colonel. He too good to us. Raise us up, help us.

ABE—[*Vaguely.*] Up! Lift me up! Up! Up tow'd de sun! [*He glances at the calendar.*] Dat whup don't hurt no mo'. De 'membrance is passed away. [*Thumping on his breast.*] Ain't no mo' bitter gall in heah. Peace. It come all suddent over me. [*He suddenly falls on his knees by the bed in a sobbing burst of prayer.*] O God, God of de po' and of de sinful!

MUH MACK—Yea, our God.

ABE—De black man's God, de white man's God, de one and only God, heah me, heah my prayer.

MUH MACK—[*Swaying and moaning.*] Heah 'im, Jesus!

GOLDIE—[*Softly.*] We dy chillun, Lawd.

ABE—Dy little chillun, and you pow'ful. You de Almighty, us de dust in dy hand. Us po' and weak, us nothing. Lak de grasshopper, lak de po' fee-lark, swept away in de storm. Man gut no stren'th in um, no muscle kin raise him, 'cepting yo' power. He walk in de wind, de wind take 'im away. Let dere be fiah, and de fiah burn um. It devour 'im. Same lak de broomstraw he fall befo' it. Man cain't stand. He lost, lost. Shet in de grave, shet till de judgment.

MUH MACK—Jesus! Jesus!

GOLDIE—[*Piteously.*] Jesus!

ABE—He fall in de winter. He lie down in de summer. De spring come and find him gone.

MUH MACK—Ha' muhcy, our Fadder.

GOLDIE—[*Whispering.*] Jesus, fohgive 'im.

ABE—[*His voice rising into a chant.*] De dirt stop up his po' mouf. Peace come to him in de ground. And de friends do cry, dey wail and beat deir breas'. Dey call foh deir love' ones, and dey don't answer. Deir tongue make no mo' speech, from de graveyard, from de deep grave.

MUH MACK—Yea, Lawd!

ABE—Dey gone at de planting, gone at de harvest. De hoe dull wid rust, de harness wait on de peg, de bridle hang, de collar hang dere useless. Dey ain't no mo' hoeing, ain't no mo' plowing, no shoe track in de furrow. Man gone, same lak a whisper, hushed in de graveyard, in de deep grave.

MUH MACK—Oh, ha' muhcy 'pon us.

GOLDIE—Muhcy!

ABE—[*Raising his head up, his eyes closed.*] Heah us, heah us, heah me dis day, heah my po' prayer. Fohgive me my sins, my blaspheamy. Wipe out de evil o' my weeked days. Purify, make clean, fohgit de 'membrance o' my transgression. Now heah I do humble down, I do cohnfess. Lift me, raise me, up, up!

MUH MACK—Hallelujah!

GOLDIE—Amen.

ABE—[*Bowing his head in a storm of grief.*] Re'ch down yo' hand and gimme stren'th. Now I draw nigh, I feel yo' sperit. Save me, save me now! [MUH MACK *and* GOLDIE *pray and moan aloud. Presently* ABE *stands up and cries out exultantly.*] He save me, he done save me! He done fohgive me!

MUH MACK—[*Clapping her hands wildly.*] Bless de Lawd, bless um!

GOLDIE—[*Faintly.*] Thank Jesus, save my baby and my husban'.

ABE *is silent a moment, his face working with emotion. He turns and bends down over the bed.*

ABE—Po' little fellow, he sleep and rest. [*He puts his arms around* GOLDIE *and she clings to him.*] Honey chile, I changed. I gwine take new holt. From dis day I begins. I sorry foh all de past. [*He loosens her arms from around his neck and stands up, a strange set look on his face.*] I gwine keep heart now, look up, rise. I gwine lead. [*Looking down at the baby.*] I gwine raise him up a light unto peoples. He be a new Moses, he bring de chillun out of bondage, out'n sin and ign'ance.

He turns suddenly and goes to the bucket at the left, pours some water out in a pan and sets it on the bed. Then he bends down and lifts the baby in his hand.

MUH MACK *looks up, drying her eyes.*

GOLDIE—Whut dat, Abe? Whut dat you doing?

ABE—[*Dipping his hand in the water and holding the child aloft, his face lighted up in a beatific smile.*] On dis day I names you Douglass. You gwine be same lak him. Yeh, better. You gwine be a light in darkness, a mighty man. [*He dips his hand into the water and sprinkles the child.*] I baptize you and consecrate you to de salvation ob my people dis day! Amen!

The women stare at him transfixed, caught out of themselves. He bends his head and stands with the child stretched before him as if making an offering to some god.

SCENE 3

WINTER *of the same year. The old Quillie house, a Negro cabin of one bare room, now fitted up as a school-house. At the left center is a squat rusty cast-iron stove, the pipe of which reels up a few feet and then topples over into an elbow to run through the wall. A box of pine knots rests on the floor by it. Four or five rough pine benches, worn slick by restless students, stretch nearly the length of the room, ending towards a small blackboard nailed to the wall in the rear center. Between the benches and the blackboard is the teacher's rickety table with a splint-bottomed chair behind it. A heavy dinner bell with a wooden handle is on the table. To the right rear is a small window, giving a glimpse of brown broomsedge stretching up a gentle hill, and beyond, a ragged field of stripped cornstalks, gray now and falling down in the rot of winter rains. To the left rear is a door opening to the outside.*

The curtain rises on the empty room. Presently ABRAHAM MC CRANIE *comes in, carrying a tin lunch bucket and two or three books. He is wearing an old overcoat and a derby hat, both making some claims to a threadbare decency. He sets the bucket and books on the table and hangs his coat and hat on a nail in the wall at the right; then comes back to the stove,*

revealing himself dressed in baggy trousers, worn slick with too much ironing, heavy short coat, cheap shirt, and a celluloid collar with no tie. With his pocket-knife he whittles some shavings from a pine knot and starts a fire in the stove. He looks at his watch, beats his hands together from cold, and stirs about the room, his brow wrinkled in thought and apparent worry. Again and again he goes to the door and stares out expectantly. Looking at his watch the second or third time, he takes up the bell and goes out and rings it.

ABE—[*Shouting towards the empty fields.*] Books! Books! Come in to books! [*He returns and sits down by the stove.*] No scholars in sight. [*With a sigh.*] Oh, me! [*He goes to the board and writes laboriously across the top:* "January 21. An idle brain is the devil's workshop." *While he is writing, three Negro students come in carrying a bucket and a book or two each—a lazy slumbrous girl of eighteen or twenty, a stout thick-lipped youth about the same age, and a little serious-faced ragged boy of ten.* ABE'S *face brightens at the sight of them.*] Good morning, chillun. Late. Everybody a little late.

STUDENTS—[*Standing uncertainly around the stove.*] Good morning, Mr. Mack.

ABE—[*Finishing his writing.*] This will be our motto foh to-day. [ABE'S *speech has improved somewhat. When he speaks with conscious deliberation he substitutes "this" for "dis," "that" for "dat,"*

and so on. But when in a hurry or excited he drops back into his old methods. He addresses the little boy.] Read it, Eddie, out loud.

EDDIE—[*Eagerly.*] I kin read it, Mr. Mack. [*In a slow and halting voice he reads.*] "A' idle brain is the devuh's wukshop."

ABE—Good, fine. Kin you read it, Neilly?

NEILLY—[*Boldly.*] Yeh, suh, read it raght off.

ABE—And how 'bout you, Lanie?

LANIE—[*Dropping her heavy-lidded eyes.*] I kin too.

She and NEILLY *look at each other with a fleeting smile over some secret between them.* EDDIE *gazes up at them, his lips moving silently as if over something to be told which he dare not utter.*

ABE—[*Pulling out his watch.*] Twenty minutes to nine. Whah the other scholars? [*No one answers.* NEILLY *gives the girl a quick look and turns deftly on his heel and kicks the stove, sticking up his lips in a low whistle.*] You see the Ragland chillun on the road, Lanie?

LANIE—[*Enigmatically.*] Yessuh, I see 'em.

ABE *goes to the door and rings his bell again.*

ABE—Books! Books! Come in to books! [*He puts the bell on the table and stands pondering.*] How 'bout the Maffis chillun?

NEILLY—Ain't coming!

ABE—Dey say so?

NEILLY—Yessuh.

ABE—[*Shortly.*] Take yo' seats. We'll go on wid our lessons if nobody else don't come.

He turns to his table.

EDDIE—[*Pulling excitedly at* LANIE'S *dress.*] G'won, ax him whut he gwine do.

LANIE—[*Snatching herself loose from him.*] Shet up. Ain't my business.

ABE—Put yo' buckets up and take yo' seats and listen to the roll-call. All the late ones ketch it on the woodpile and sweeping up the school-yard. [*Eyeing them.*] I said take yo' seat.

EDDIE *hurries to his seat.*

NEILLY—Ain't gwine have no school, is we?

ABE—Hunh?

NEILLY—Ain't gwine be no mo' school.

LANIE *giggles.*

ABE—[*With a worried note in his voice.*] Going have school same as usual. Seem lak all of 'em late dough. Take yo' seats, time foh the spelling lesson. Won't have de scripture reading dis mawning.

NEILLY—De rest of 'em done quit school.

LANIE *giggles again.*

ABE—Stop dat giggling and go to yo' seat.

LANIE *moves to her seat sulkily.*

EDDIE. [*In a high frightened quaver.*] Mr. Mack, dey all say de school ain't gwine run no mo' and dey ain't coming.

ABE—How dey hear it? I ain't heard it. [*No one answers.*] Whah'd you folks get all dis news, Neilly?

NEILLY—Dey was all talking it down de road. We wouldn't a-come eiver, but Eddie dah beg me and Lanie so hard to come wid 'im. Ain't no mo' folks coming dough.

ABE—[*Hitting the table with his fist.*] Sump'n' up. Dey got to show me fo' I quits, dey got to show me. Putt up yo' buckets and things, we going have school. [*They reluctantly set down their buckets near the wall and stand waiting.*] Take yo' seats, I say, and listen to yo' name. [*He pulls out a cheap arm-and-hammer memorandum book and begins calling the roll.*] Lanie Horton.

LANIE—Presunt.

She looks around at the bare seats and gives her senseless giggle.

ABE—Vanderbilt Jones, absent; 'Ona May Jordan, absent; Jane Matthews, absent; Sister Matthews, absent; Jennie McAhlister, absent; Neilly McNeill.

NEILLY—Present.

He smiles at LANIE.

ABE—Arthur Ragland, absent. Didn't 'spect him back nohow. Dora Ragland, absent; Nora Ragland, absent; Eddie Williams.

EDDIE—Prizzunt.

ABE *sits drumming on the table and staring before him. The students twist about on their seats in embarrassment.*

ABE—[*Roughly.*] Spelling lesson! [*The three move out and stand in a line before him.*] How many of you been over it at least fo' times?

EDDIE *raises his hand.*

EDDIE—I been over it nine times fo'w'd and six back'ards.

ABE—You, Neilly?

NEILLY—I been over it onct and part twict, Mr. Mack.

ABE—Lanie?

LANIE—I dunno hardly.

ABE—Have you studied it any?

LANIE—[*Pouting.*] I done lost my book somewhah.

ABE—And you wuh supposed to be head to-day. You'n Neilly kin clean up the paper and sweep 'round

the well at recess. Le's see yo' book, Eddie. [EDDIE *hands him his book.*] Eddie you got a head-mark yistiddy; so you foot to-day. [*Opening the book.*] The first word is "chew," chew, lak vittles, Lanie, "chew."

LANIE—C-c. C-u, "chew."

ABE—One mo' trial.

LANIE—[*Pondering a long while.*] I cain't spell dat.

ABE—Yes, you kin. Try it.

LANIE—C-h-ŭ, "chew."

ABE—Next.

NEILLY—[*Smiling ruefully.*] Too hahd foh me. Des' well pass on.

ABE—[*Working his jaws up and down.*] Watch me wuk my jaws. That's chew, chewing. Spell at it, Neilly, "chew."

NEILLY—[*Scratching his head and nervously boring the floor with the toe of his shoe.*] Cain't do it, cain't fohm no letters in my head.

ABE—I'll have to pass it den.

NEILLY—[*Taking a hopeless shot at it.*] S-s. S-u, "chew." No, dat wrong. I seed dat word on de page, but cain't remember it now. I cain't spell it. Gi' it to Eddie, he kin.

ABE—All right, Eddie.

EDDIE—C-h-e-w—"chew."

He darts around NEILLY *and* LANIE *and stands triumphantly at the head of the class.*

ABE—I goin' send you back to yo' seats to study twenty minutes. Then come back heah and don't you make no such mess of it. I'll put the writing lesson up while you study. [*They go to their seats.*] Lanie, you look wid Eddie in his book. [*He turns to the board and begins to write down the copy models. As he writes, the students mumble over their words in a drone.* NEILLY *and* LANIE *begin talking to each other in low whispers.* EDDIE *is lost in his book.* LANIE *suddenly giggles out loud, and* ABE *turns quickly from his board.*] Heigh you, Lanie, stand up in dat corner over thah. School isn't out yit.

LANIE—I ain't done nothing. [*Half audibly.*] "Isn't!"

ABE—Don't talk back. Stand in de corner wid yo' face to de wall. Hyuh, Eddie, you read in dis reader and let her have yo' book.

LANIE *creeps over to the corner and mouths over her lesson.* ABE *finishes his apothegm,* "A Wise man will rise with the sun, or before it." *He is finishing another,* "Wise children will imitate the manners of polite people," *when there is a stir at the door and* PUNY AVERY *comes in, swallowed up in a teamster's coat and carrying a long blacksnake whip in his hand.*

PUNY—Good mawning.

ABE—Good morning, Mr. Avery.

At the appellation of "Mister" PUNY *stuffs his cap against his mouth to hide a grin.*

PUNY—How you come on, Mr. McCranie? Kin I warm my hands a minute? Freezing col' setting on dat waggin seat.

He moves up to the stove and stretches his hands above it.

ABE—Help yo'se'f. Be a snow fo' night, I believe.

PUNY—Yeh, or—look lak it.

He warms himself, and ABE *sits at the table watching him questioningly. Now and then his gaze drops upon the whip.*

ABE—Hauling lumber over the river?

PUNY—Is dat. [*Looking at* LANIE *in the corner.*] Whut she do?

ABE—Misbehaved.

PUNY—Seem lak yo' school kinda thin. [ABE *says nothing.*] Been gitting thinner ev'y since Colonel died last fall, ain't it?

ABE—Been dropping off some since then.

PUNY—Whah all de rest o' de scholars?

ABE—Haven't showed up yet.

PUNY—Uhm.

ABE—Why you want to know, might I ask.

PUNY—[*Authoritatively.*] Already know. And foh yo' own good I come by to tell you and to bring you a message.

ABE—[*Looking at him intently and then waving his hand at the three students.*] You chillun kin go out and have recess now. Mr. Avery wants to see me on a little business. [LANIE *and* NEILLY *get their coats and walk out.* EDDIE *remains crouched in his seat, unconscious of his surroundings.*] What message you got foh me?

PUNY—You des' well quit de school business raght heah and now. Dey ain't gwine send to you no mo'.

ABE—What's the trouble?

PUNY—Trouble! You gone and done it, you has, when you beat Will Ragland's boy yistiddy. Will so mad he kin kill you.

ABE—[*Anger rising in his voice.*] Needn't think I'm skeahed of him.

PUNY—I knows you ain't. But you wants to keep on teaching, don't you?

ABE—Yeh, and I'm going to.

PUNY—Nunh-unh, you ain't neiver. Will went 'round last night and gut everybody to say dey won't

gwine send to you no mo'. Dey ain't gwine stand foh no nigger beating deir young 'uns.

ABE—[*Angrily.*] I had a right to beat him. I couldn't make him work no other way, and 'sides he told a lie to me. Said he didn't eat up po' little Sis Maffis' dinner. Several of 'em seen him do it.

PUNY—Cain't he'p it. You beat 'im so dey had to have a doctor foh him, and Will done gone to de sher'ff to git out papers foh you.

ABE—[*Starting out of his chair.*] Gwine have me 'rested?

PUNY—He is dat. And mo', I reckon. And my advice to you is to git f'om heah. As a member of de school boa'd I say, bedder leave.

ABE—He think he kin run me 'way?

PUNY—Don't know what he think. Know I wouldn't lak to lie in no white man's jail-house, dat's me.

ABE—De otheh members of the boa'd know 'bout it?

PUNY—Us had a meeting last night.

ABE—What dey say?

PUNY—[*Fumbling in his pockets.*] Dey all side wid Will, 'count o' de beating and 'count o' dat speech you made in chu'ch last Sunday.

ABE—Wuh Mr. Lonnie dere?

PUNY—He dere and he send dis heah writing to you.

He pulls a note from his pocket and hands it to ABE, *who opens it excitedly.*

ABE—[*Clenching his fist.*] Dat man say heah—God-—— He say de boa'd done all 'cided de school got to stop. [*He tears the note to pieces and throws it in the stove.*] He say dere he know a good job in Raleigh at public wuk he kin git me. [*Bitterly.*] Say I do better at dat dan farming or school. [*Pacing the floor, he throws his hand above his head.*] Nanh, anh—suh, I sets a oaf on high, I ain't going let 'em run me off. Dey cain't skeah me. Dey cain't run me off lak I stole sump'n'. [*He turns on* PUNY *with blazing eyes and* EDDIE *watches him terrified.*] Why you all vote dat way? Whyn't you stand up and vote foh me? You know I trying do right. You weak, coward, no backbone.

PUNY—[*Backing towards the door.*] I ain't gut nothing 'gin you, Abe. Why you 'buse me?

ABE—Git out o' heah. All o' you down on me. Dat speech was so. It was right. Dat beating was right. [*Crying out.*] I ain't gwine give in. Dey cain't run me. You cain't run me. I fight 'em. I stay heah. Let 'em putt me in de jail, I last till de jail rot down. [*He moves menacingly towards* PUNY, *who flees through the door and slams it after him.*] I come through deir bars, deir iron won't hold me. I'll git dere, I'll come. My flesh will be as tough as deir iron! [*He goes to the table and picks up his books.*

He opens the Bible and stands thinking. Dropping into his chair, he sits with his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand, gazing into the distance. The anger and bitterness gradually pass from his face.] Dat man's talk, proud. Cain't push through 'thout help— [*Putting his hand on the Bible.*] 'thout help from up there. [*He bows his head on the table.* EDDIE *begins to sob and, leaving his seat timidly, approaches* ABE'S *bent form, gulping and wiping his nose and eyes with his sleeve.* ABE *looks up and puts his arm around him.*] Son, this heah's the last of this school. But we cain't stop, we got to keep on. [EDDIE *leans his head against him, his sobs increasing.*] Got to keep studying, got to keep climbing. [*After a moment he stands up and writes across the board,* "This School is stopped for a while." LANIE *and* NEILLY *come inquiringly in.*] Chillun, ain't goin' to be no mo' school till mebbe next yeah. You kin go home. [LANIE *giggles and* NEILLY *looks at him with familiar condescension.*] But I wants to dismiss with a word of prayer. [*At a sign from him,* EDDIE *falls on his knees by the table. He gets down at his chair.*] Our Father, where two or three is gathered— [NEILLY *and* LANIE *look at him, pick up their buckets and scurry out giggling and laughing loudly.* ABE *springs to his feet, his face blank with astonishment. He calls after them furiously.*] Heigh, heigh, you!

They are heard going off, their sharp laughter softening in the distance.

NEILLY—'Fo' Gohd, he down on his knees!

LANIE—[*Her voice growing faint.*] Yeh, and he 'bout kilt Arth yistiddy.

NEILLY—Haw—haw—haw.

LANIE—Hee—hee—hee.

Their voices die away.

SCENE 4

FIFTEEN *years later. A room in the poverty-stricken Negro section of Durham, North Carolina, as it was then. When the curtain rises,* GOLDIE *is washing at a tub placed on a goods-box at the left of the room.* MUH MACK *is seated at the fireplace at the right, bent under a slat bonnet and dozing. Pots and pans are piled around the hearth and a kettle is singing on the fire. Several garments are hanging on chairs before the fire drying.*

To the left rear is a bed with a pile of rough-dried clothes on it. A door at the center rear leads into another room. To the right of the door is a low chest with books and dishes set upon it. At the right front by the chimney is a small window letting in the sickly light of a dying winter day. In the center of the room is a small eating-table covered with a greasy, spotted oil-cloth.

For several minutes neither of the women says anything. GOLDIE *washes heavily at the tub, her body bent and disfigured with the years of toil and poverty and the violence of childbirth. She wrings out a garment and takes it to the fireplace.*

GOLDIE—[*Lifelessly.*] Move yo'se'f, Muh. Lemme hang up dis shirt.

MUH MACK—[*Testily as she moves her chair with her body.*] Lemme 'lone. Cain't sleep, rest—nothing.

GOLDIE *drags up a chair, hangs the shirt on it and returns to her washing. Her movements are slow, ox-like, and in her eyes now and then comes a sort of vacant look as if some deadening disease has had its way within her brain, or as if trouble and worry have hardened her beyond the possibility of enthusiasm or grief any more. Between her eyes a deep line has furrowed itself, a line often found on the foreheads of those who think a great deal or those who are forgetting how to think at all. And her mouth has long ago fastened itself into a drawn anguished questioning that has no easeful answer in the world. She washes away at the tub, the garment making a kind of flopping sound against the board. After a moment she calls to* MUH MACK.

GOLDIE—Gitting neah 'bout day-down, Muh. Time to start supper.

MUH MACK—[*Whom age and poverty have made meaner than before.*] Yeh, yeh, it is, and I gut to git it, I reckon.

GOLDIE—[*Making an effort to hurry.*] Yeh, Mis' Duke got to have her clothes to-morrow, I done said.

MUH MACK—[*Getting slowly to her feet.*] Oh, me my! My leg done gone to sleep! [*She fumbles among the pans on the hearth.*] Yo' water hyuh all gwine bile 'way.

GOLDIE—Gimme hyuh!

She takes the kettle and pours the water into the tub and then goes on scrubbing the clothes.

MUH MACK—Whut I gwine cook?

GOLDIE—Make some cawn bread, and dey's a little piece o' Baltimo' meat in de chist.

MUH MACK *arranges her pan on the fire with much grumbling and growling and goes over to the chest.*

MUH MACK—[*Knocking the pile of books off with a bang.*] Heah dem ol' books of Abe's piled right hyuh in de way. Minner mind to burn 'em up. Allus whah dey ain't gut no business.

GOLDIE—[*Abstractedly.*] Yeh, yeh. Always minner mind to burn 'em.

MUH MACK *opens the chest and pulls out a small piece of white meat.*

MUH MACK—Hunh, look at dis, will you? Ain't mo'n 'nough to fill my old hollow toof. Cain't us git sump'n' else foh supper? I et dat old meat and cawn bread till it makes me heave to look at it.

GOLDIE—Dat all dey is.

MUH MACK—Dat won't make a mou'ful foh Abe. Whut we gwine eat?

GOLDIE—Abe won't eat it nohow, and I don't want nothing. You'n Douglass kin eat it.

MUH MACK—Bofe of you gwine die if you don't eat. Dat Abe been living off'n cawfee and bread two weeks now. No wonder he look lak a shadow and cain't ha'f do his work.

GOLDIE—Cain't eat when you ain't gut it.

MUH MACK—Well, starving ain't gwine give you stren'th to git no mo'. How you gwine keep washing foh folks and you don't eat?

GOLDIE—[*Bowing her head in weariness over the tub, her voice rising with sudden shrillness.*] Oh, Lawd Gohd in heaven, I don't know.

MUH MACK—Calling on Gohd ain't gwine he'p you git no supper eiver. [*Throwing the meat back into the chest and slamming the lid.*] Well, I ain't gwine cook dat old mess. I'll set right heah by dis fiah and starve wid you and Abe.

GOLDIE—[*Drying her hands on her apron.*] I gut des' one mo' fifty-cent piece in dat pocketbook. I'll git it and run out and buy some liver den. Po' Abe gut to live somehow. [*She goes out at the rear and returns immediately holding an empty ragged purse in her hand.*] Whah my ha'f dollar! Whah is it?

MUH MACK—[*Dropping into a chair by the fire.*] Hunh, needn't ax me. Ain't seed it.

GOLDIE—[*Sitting down and rocking back and forth.*] Somebody stole it. [*Turning upon* MUH MACK.] You done gin it to dat Douglass.

MUH MACK—Ain't.

GOLDIE—Yeh, you has, you has.

MUH MACK—[*Beating the floor with her foot.*] Ain't, I tell you.

GOLDIE—[*Staggering to her feet.*] And he off somewhah's spending it foh ice-cream and mess.

MUH MACK—Don't keer 'f I did. Po' boy do widdout all de time.

GOLDIE—[*Falling on the tub with renewed vigor.*] Cain't cry now!

MUH MACK—G'won down dere and git dat man to let you have sump'n' on a credit. You can pay 'im to-morrow when Mis' Duke pay you.

GOLDIE—He done said he ain't gwine let us have no mo' widdout de money.

MUH MACK—Mebbe Abe fetch sump'n' when he come.

GOLDIE—How kin he and dey don't pay 'im off till to-morrow evening?

MUH MACK—[*Suddenly crying out with a whimper.*] Look lak us gwine starve spite of all. I wants to go back home. I wants to go back to home. Mr. Lonnie won't let us do widdout.

GOLDIE—I been wanting to go back foh fifteen yeah, but Abe's gwine die fo' he go back.

MUH MACK—[*Beating her hands together in her lap.*] Crazy, crazy! He de biggest fool in de whole world. He gitting down lower eve'y day. Gitting sick wuss all de time. Oh, me, whut'll become of us all!

GOLDIE—[*Hopelessly.*] De Lawd mebbe'll pervide.

MUH MACK—[*Snorting.*] Hunh, he mought. He ain't gwine pervide nothing less'n us do sump'n'. [*Her voice falling into a sort of hypocritical whine.*] Heah I is all laid up wid rheumatiz and cain't see how to trabbel no mo' and 'bout to starve. Starve, heah me!

GOLDIE—[*Dropping into her chair again.*] You ain't de on'y one.

MUH MACK—Reckon I knows it. But dat don't keep my stomach f'om cutting up.

GOLDIE—We doing de best we kin by you.

MUH MACK—[*Somewhat softened.*] I knows it, chile, but dat Abe, dat Abe, I say! He de trouble at de bottom of it all.

GOLDIE—Needn't keep talking 'bout Abe. Why don't you say dat to his face. He doing de best he kin.

MUH MACK—[*Her anger rising.*] I will tell him. Dere you set, Goldie McCranie, and say dat, after he done drug you f'om pillar to post foh fifteen yeah. Doing de best he kin! He ain't nothing, des' wuss'n nothing! He des' a plumb fool. But he

mammy wuh a fool befo' 'im. Da's how come he in dis worl'.

GOLDIE—Stop dat. He sick, been sick a long time, po' fellow, and he keep trying.

MUH MACK—Sick! He wa'n't sick back dere when he got into co't and lost all his land trying to git dem lawyers to keep 'im out'n jail, and he beat dat Will Ragland's boy ha'f to death. [GOLDIE *bows her head in her hands, swaying from side to side.*] De devil in him! Dat's what.

GOLDIE—[*Wretchedly.*] You done sot dere by dat fiah and told me dat same tale time and ag'in, day in, day out. I don't want to heah it no mo'.

MUH MACK—Unh-unh. And I reckon you will dough. Wuh he sick, and he cutting up a rust in Raleigh and de niggers and white folks runnin' him out'n dere? It was old Scratch in him dere too. I tells you.

GOLDIE—Dey didn't treat 'im right over dere.

MUH MACK—Hunh. No, dey didn't. And dey didn't treat him raght in Greensboro, did dey? Same old tale dere, gitting in a row wid somebody and ha' to leave. He's mean, mean lak sump'n' mad at de world.

GOLDIE—[*Tossing her head about her.*] I dunno. I dunno. He orter nevah married me and gut tied down. Seem lak things all go wrong, crosswise foh him.

MUH MACK—[*Staring at her.*] Hunh. Things'll be crosswise wid 'im till dey straighten 'im out in de grave. Dem's my words. [*Blowing her nose in her skirt and half weeping.*] If all dat shooting and killing in Wilmington wouldn't make 'im do better, nothing in de Gohd's world kin.

GOLDIE—[*Moaning.*] Stop dat talking. I cain't beah it.

MUH MACK—Dat's des' whut you orter stop doing, stop beahing it. Gather up yo' duds and take me'n Douglass and whop off'n leave 'im, dat's what you orter do.

GOLDIE—[*Beating herself with her fists.*] I ain't. I ain't. I gwine stay by 'im.

MUH MACK—Co'se you gwine stay by 'im—and starve too. Foh dat's whut you'll do. Whut he don't spend on medicine he do on dem old lodges and sich and books and newspapers. And gits turned out'n eve'y one of 'em foh his speeches and wild talk, he do. [*With grim satisfaction.*] Shoveling dat coal down at de power house reckon'll hold him down foh a while. [*With an afterthought.*] Hold 'im down till somebody crack his haid wid a shovel and tu'n 'im off. [*Stirring the fire and then folding up her hands.*] I done said my say-so now. Do no good, 'caze you so wropped up in de fool.

GOLDIE—[*Flaring out.*] No, it won't do no good. I gwine stick by him. [*Rising and turning to her work again.*] Dey ain't never done 'im right. Dey all been down on him f'om de fust.

MUH MACK—[*Shrilly.*] And 'll be till de last. Otheh niggers makes a living foh deir fambly. Why don't he? Allus gut his eyes on sump'n' else.

GOLDIE—He gwine be a big man yit. Dem udder niggehs do de dirty work and take whut dey kin git. Dey de low-down trash. [*Her voice trembling.*] He gwine git him a big school some dese days.

MUH MACK—[*Laughing scornfully.*] Hee-hee—hee. Listen at him. He cain't teach nothing. De niggeh school teachers round hyuh know mo'n a minute dan Abe do in a week. Dey been to college at Raleigh and Greensboro and no telling whah. And dey gut some sense 'sides deir learning. Dat li'l Eddie Williams has. He done gone th'ough dat Shaw school in Raleigh and is off doing big wuk. Why couldn't Abe do sump'n' lak dat!

GOLDIE—[*Her voice breaking.*] Shet up, I tell you.

MUH MACK—[*Sulkily.*] Aw right den, but dat talk don't fill yo' stomach. [*Pulling a walking stick from the chimney corner.*] I gwine go down to Liza's and ax her to gi' me some supper.

She groans and creaks to her feet.

GOLDIE—You been down to Liza's till she's tiahed o' feeding you.

MUH MACK—[*Waving her stick in the air.*] Well, you feed me den.

GOLDIE—Wait'll Douglass come f'om school and I'll git him to go down to de cawner and git some meat f'om dat man.

MUH MACK—Done past time foh Douglass to be heah. Mought not come till late.

GOLDIE—[*Drying her hands again and patting her hair.*] I'll go den. You putt de kittle on foh some cawfee and set de table and I'll be right back. [*Far off a muffled whistle blows.*] Dere's de power-house whistle. Abe be heah soon. Light de lamp and putt on de table. [*She goes out.*]

MUH MACK—[*Somewhat mollified, calling after her.*] Aw raght.

She puts her stick back in the corner, fills the kettle and stirs stiffly about her, bringing plates to the table and laying out the knives and forks. She hobbles into the room at the rear and returns with a lamp without any chimney, which she lights at the fireplace and places on the table. While she is engaged in making coffee over the fire, DOUGLASS *strolls in. He is a young Negro in short trousers, fifteen or sixteen years old, black as* MUH MACK *and with something of a wild and worthless spirit already beginning to show in his face. He carries two ragged books under his arm.*

DOUGLASS—[*Dropping the books by the door and kicking them near the chest.*] Heigh!

MUH MACK—[*Jumping.*] Who?—hee—hee, you

skeahed me, honey. [*She stands up and looks at him indulgently.*] Whah you been so late?

DOUGLASS—Oh, round and about. Stopped by de hot dawg stand awhile, chewing de rag wid some fellows.

MUH MACK—How many dem sa'sage things you eat?

DOUGLASS—Dunno. Sev'al.

MUH MACK—[*Leaning forward, her eyes shining with anticipation.*] Whut you fotch me to eat?

DOUGLASS—I wanted to bring you sump'n', but——

MUH MACK—You mean you ain't bought me nothing wid dat fifty cents?

DOUGLASS—I fool-lak matched wid some ub'm down dere and had to set 'em up.

MUH MACK—And I so hongry I cain't see straight!

DOUGLASS—[*Nonchalantly.*] I cain't he'p it.

MUH MACK—[*Threateningly.*] I gwine tell yo' daddy on you.

DOUGLASS—[*Looking at her.*] Hunh, you better not. Do and I won't play nary piece foh you in—in two weeks mebbe.

MUH MACK—[*Turning to her cooking.*] Yo' muh know 'bout it.

DOUGLASS—Why you tell her?

MUH MACK—She guessed at it. She knowed you tuck dat money soon's she found it gone.

DOUGLASS—[*Alarmed.*] Pap don't know, do he?

MUH MACK—Not yit. He ain't come f'om wuk. [*He turns back into the room at the rear and reappears with a guitar. Sitting down wonderfully at ease, he begins strumming.*] Lawd, Lawd, honey, gi' us a piece 'fo' yo' daddy comes. [*He falls to playing and* MUH MACK *begins to pat the floor and skip happily now and then as she moves about the fireplace.*] Hee-hee—dat bedder'n eating.

DOUGLASS—[*Hugging up the "box" and throwing back his head in abandon.*] Hee-hee—ain't it dough! [*He turns and scowls at the books lying on the floor, and begins singing to them.*] Dem old books—[*Strum, strum.*] lying in de corner, [*Strum, strum.*] Dem old books—[*Strum, strum.*] lying in de corner—[*Strum, strum.*] Lie dere, babies, lie dere! Hee-hee—Muh Mack, I kin make music raght out'n my haid. [*He goes on throwing his fingers across the strings.*]

MUH MACK—You kin, honey, you sho'ly kin.

She sits listening happily. He wraps himself over the guitar, his fingers popping up and down the neck of the instrument with marvelous dexterity. His bowed head begins to weave about him rhythmically as he bursts into snatches of song.

DOUGLASS—[*Singing.*]

Look down, look down dat lonesome road,
De hacks all dead in line.
Some give a nickel, some give a dime
To bury dis po' body o' mine.

MUH MACK—[*Staring at him.*] I declah! I declah! Listen at dat chile.

DOUGLASS—Ne'h mind, ne'h min' me. [*Modulating with amazing swiftness from key to key.*] And dere was po' Brady. Po' old Brady.

MUH MACK—Yeh, Brady, dey laid him down to die.

DOUGLASS—[*Singing.*]

Oh, Brady, Brady, you know you done me wrong,
You come in when de game was a-goin' on!
And dey laid po' Brady down.

Wimmens in Gawgy dey heard de news
Walking 'bout in deir little red shoes,
Dey glad, dey glad po' Brady dead.

When I close my eyes to ketch a liddle sleep,
Po' old Brady about my bed do creep,
One mo', des' one mo' rounder gone.

While he is singing and playing, ABE *comes suddenly in at the rear dragging a heavy wooden box in one hand and carrying a dinner-pail in the other. He is dirty and begrimed with coal dust.*

ABE—[*Shouting.*] Put up dat box! [DOUGLASS *bounds out of his chair as if shot and backs away from him.*] Putt down dat damn guitah, you good-foh-nothing!

ABE *hangs his cap and dinner-pail on a nail by the door and comes heavily across to the fire. His face is haggard and old and his shoulders have grown humped with the going of time.* DOUGLASS *slips out with his guitar and presently creeps in and sits stealthily on the chest.* ABE *lays the goods box on the floor and breaks it up and places pieces of it on the fire. Then he sits down and stretches out his feet and stares moodily before him.* MUH MACK *hurries around making bread, frying the hated side meat, and arranging the table.*

MUH MACK—[*Tremulously.*] How you feeling? You come quick adder de whistle—

ABE—Ah, feel lak I'll stifle in heah. [*He strikes his breast once and then follows it with a fury of savage blows.*] Cain't git no wind down in dat b'iler house. [*He drags his hand wearily across his brow and shakes his head as if clearing his eyes of a fog.*] Whah Goldie?

MUH MACK—Gone out to de cawner to git some meat. Time she back.

ABE—How long fo' supper?

MUH MACK—Soon's she gits back and we kin cook de meat.

ABE—[*Pulling off his shoes and setting them in the corner.*] I' going to lie down a minute till my head clears up. Feel lak it'll blow off at de top. [*Grasping his chair, he staggers to his feet and goes across the room. At the door he stops and looks down at* DOUGLASS.] I' going to tend to you in a little bit.

DOUGLASS *quails before him. He goes out and slams the door.*

MUH MACK—Whut de name o' Gohd ail him now? Wus'n ever.

DOUGLASS—[*Whimpering.*] He gwine beat me! He'll kill me.

The bed is heard creaking in the rear room as ABE *lies down.*

MUH MACK—Whut'n de world foh?

She stands tapping her hands together helplessly.

DOUGLASS—He done heahed sump'n' on me. Oh, he gwine beat me to deaf.

ABE *is heard turning in his bed again, and he immediately appears in the door.*

ABE—Shet up dat whimpering. Git over dere and start washing on dem clothes foh yo' po' mammy. [DOUGLASS *darts over and begins rubbing at the board and sniffling.*] Dry up, I tell you.

ABE *turns back to his bed.*

MUH MACK—[*Sitting to the fire and rocking back and forth in her anxiety.*] Oh, Lawd—Lawd!

She hides her head in her skirt grumbling and moaning. Presently GOLDIE *comes in.*

GOLDIE—[*Coming over to the tub.*] Look out, son, lemme git at 'em.

She falls to washing feverishly.

MUH MACK [*Looking up.*] Whah dat meat, Goldie?

GOLDIE—Dat man look at me and laugh, dat's whut. [*Turning angrily towards* DOUGLASS.] You went and——

MUH MACK—[*Throwing out her hand in alarm.*] Nanh, nanh, Goldie. [*Lowering her voice and nodding to the rear.*] Abe in dere. He find out 'bout dat, he kill de boy. Done say he gwine beat 'im foh sump'n' 'nother.

GOLDIE—When he come?

MUH MACK—He des' dis minute gut heah.

GOLDIE—[*In alarm.*] He wuss off, I bet. [*She hurries into the room and is heard talking softly and kindly to* ABE. *He answers her with indistinct growls. In a moment* GOLDIE *returns.*] Putt whut you gut on de table and le's eat. [*She goes on with her washing.*] Abe ain't feeling well. Hadder eat whut he kin, I reckon.

MUH MACK *puts the bread, coffee and meat on the table.*

MUH MACK—Come on, you all.

GOLDIE—Come on in, Abe. [ABE *enters in his undershirt and trousers.*] G'won and eat, I don't want nothing.

ABE—[*Almost falling in his chair.*] Come on and set whedder you can or not. [GOLDIE *takes her place at the table.*] Come on, Douglass.

DOUGLASS—I don't want nothing eiver.

MUH MACK *draws up her chair.*

ABE—Don't make no difference. I said come on. [DOUGLASS *gets a chair and takes his place.* ABE *surveys the fare before him.*] Dis all you got foh a working man and he sick?

GOLDIE—I didn' have no money and——

She gulps and drops her head to hide her tears.

ABE—[*Kindly as he reaches out and touches her shoulders.*] Neveh mind, honey chile. [*He closes his eyes with weariness and sits brooding. Presently he raises his head.*] Well, neveh you mind, I ain't hungry. [*Looking at her sadly.*] But you must be plumb wore out wid all dat washing and all. [*Dropping his head.*] Le's have de blessing. Oh, Lawd, we thank Thee foh what we have befo' us. Make us truly thankful foh all Thy gifts and save

us at last, we humbly beg, foh Christ's sake, Amen! [*After the blessing is over* GOLDIE *still keeps her head bowed, her shoulders heaving with sobs.* MUH MACK *pours out the coffee and hands it round.* ABE *calls to* GOLDIE.] Come on eat sump'n', Goldie, you feel better, you git yo' stren'th back. Drink some this coffee. [GOLDIE, *bursting into wild sobs, goes and sits by the fire.*] What's de matter, chile?

MUH MACK—She done wuked to deaf and nothing to wuk on, dat's whut.

ABE—[*Drinking down a cup of steaming coffee at a gulp.*] Po' me some mo' of dat! [GOLDIE'S *sobs gradually die away.*] Come on, honey, don't cry no mo'.

GOLDIE *stands up and looks towards the table with anguished face.*

GOLDIE—Abe, Abe honey babe, whut us gwine do?

She buries her face in her hands.

ABE—You done heahed sump'n', ain't you?

GOLDIE—Yeh, yeh, Liza told me. Jim done come f'om de power house and told her.

ABE—[*Dully.*] Neveh mind. Come on drink some coffee. We talk 'bout dat directly. I got sump'n' else to tell you, too.

MUH MACK—[*Staring at him in fear.*] Whut dat happen at de power house?

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ABE—I tell you when I git good and ready. Come on, Goldie, chile. [GOLDIE *wipes her eyes and returns to the table to drink her coffee.*] Befo' we gits on what happened wid me, I got a question to ax dis young gentleman. [*Looking across at* DOUGLASS.] Why don't you eat?

DOUGLASS—[*Falteringly.*] I ain't hongry.

ABE—Try and see do you want anything.

DOUGLASS—I cain't eat nothing.

ABE—How come?

DOUGLASS—I des' don't want nothing.

ABE—[*Bitterly.*] I reckon I know how come. Dis evening I pass on the other side of de street and see you down dere at dat drink stand setting up dem wuthless niggers wid yo' mammy's good money. [*Savagely.*] Oh, yeh, I know dat's whah you got it. I see you last night watching her putt it away.

GOLDIE—Please don't have no mo' row, Abe.

ABE—I ain't gwine beat 'im foh dat, nunh-unh. Sump'n' else he's goin' to ketch it foh. [*Raging out.*] De teacher stop me on de street and tell me you doing wuss'n ever in yo' books and she done had to putt you back in third reader. [*Swallowing his third cup of coffee down with a hunk of bread, he stands up and stares into the distance.*] Heah we done labor and sweat foh you, fix foh you to rise up and be sump'n'. Eight yeah you been going to school and you won't

work, you won't learn. [*He strikes the table with his fist, and the lamp flickers and almost goes out.*] You ain't no good. Onct I thought you gwine go on, climb, rise high and lead.

He seizes him by the collar and, lifting him from the floor, shakes him like a rag.

DOUGLASS—[*Sputtering and choking.*] Pap, papa!

MUH MACK—[*Whining in terror.*] Stop dat! You kill him!

ABE—I teach you to fool wid dem low niggers! I git you out'n dem trifling ways or I'll break yo' back in two. [*He sits down and jerks the boy across his knee and begins beating him blindly.*] I name you foh a great man, a man what stand high lak de sun, and you turn out to be de lowest of de low! Change yo' name, dat's what you better do. [*With a cuff on the cheek he hurls him across the room, where he falls sobbing and wailing on the floor.*] Shet dat fuss up! [DOUGLASS' *sobs gradually cease.* GOLDIE *starts toward him, but* ABE *jerks her back.*] Let 'im lie dere, de skunk and coward.

GOLDIE *turns despairingly to her washing again.* ABE *moves to the fire and sits down, pulling a wrinkled newspaper out of his pockets, while* MUH MACK *rocks and slobbers and moans.*

MUH MACK—You need de law on you, Abe McCranie. You beat dat po' baby——

ABE—Shet up! You what gwine ruin him. He takes adder you and yo' trifling.

MUH MACK—Oh, I gwine leave heah, find me 'nudder place to stay.

ABE—We all got to git another place to stay.

GOLDIE—Le's go back home, Abe! Le's go back.

MUH MACK—Ha' we gut to leave 'caze whut you done down at de power house? [*Wringing her hands.*] Whut you do down dere? Oh, Lawd!

ABE—Ain't no use waking up de neighborhood wid yo' yelling. I didn't do nothing but stand up foh my rights. A white man sass me and I sass back at him. And a crowd of 'em run me off. Won't be able to git no other job in dis town, God damn it! [*Standing up and shaking his fist.*] God damn de people in dis town! Dem wid deir 'bacco warehouses, and cotton mills, and money in de bank, you couldn't handle wid a shovel!

MUH MACK—Le's go back home. De Colonel fix it in his will so us could have a place to come back to. Mr. Lonnie'll rent us some land.

GOLDIE—[*Coming over to* ABE'S *chair and dropping on her knees beside him.*] Abe, Abe, le's go back. Please do. Le's go back whah we growed up. Ain't no home foh us in no town. We gut to git back to de country. Dat's whah we belong.

She lays her head in his lap.

ABE—[*Looking down at her tenderly.*] Yeh, yeh, honey. We is gwine back. Adder all dese yeahs I knows now de town ain't no place foh us. Fifteen yeah we been trying to make it and couldn't. Dat's what I was going to tell you. All de signs been ag'in us. I orter knowed it after three or fo' yeahs. Back home de place foh us. Back in our own country. [*Staring before him and a smile suddenly sweetening the hardness of his face.*] We go back dere and take a new start. We going to build up on a new foundation. Took all dese yeahs to show me. [*His voice rising exultantly.*] Dere's whah my work is cut out to be. It come to me dis evening while I walked on de street. [*Standing up.*] Seem lak sump'n' spoke to me and said go back down on de Cape Fair River. I heard it plain lak a voice talking. "Dese streets and dese peoples ain't yo' peoples. Yo'n is de kind what works and labors wid de earf and de sun. Dem who knows de earth and the fullness thereof. Dere's whah yo' harvest is to be." And den when I come face to face wid de ruining of my boy, in my anger I see de way clear. We going back, we going back. And dere at last I knows I'm going to build up and lead! And my boy going to be a man. [*Looking at* DOUGLASS *with a hint of pleadingness.*] Ain't it so?

But DOUGLASS *only stares at him coldly.*

GOLDIE—[*Looking up at him.*] I knows you will. I feel it des' de way you do. I keep telling Muh Mack some day you gwine git dere.

ABE—[*Gazing down at her.*] Dese yeahs all been sent foh our trial, ain't dey, honey?

GOLDIE—Yeh, yeh, we been tried all foh a purpose.

ABE—And now we ready, ain't we, honey?

GOLDIE—We ready to go back and start all over.

MUH MACK—[*Repeating uncertainly.*] To start all over.

ABE—To build us a monument from generation unto generation.

GOLDIE—[*Softly, the tears pouring from her eyes.*] Yeh, yeh.

ABE—And all dis sin and tribulation and sorrow will be forgot, passed away, wiped out till de judgment, won't it, chile?

GOLDIE—It will, oh, I knows it will. We done suffered our share and Old Moster gwine be good to us now.

ABE—Good! Yeh, good!

He sits with bowed head.

SCENE 5

THREE *years later. The same as Scene Two, in* ABE'S *cabin on the* MC CRANIE *farm. The room shows some sign of improvement over its former state. There is a lambrequin of crêpe paper on the mantel, a wooden clock, and at the right a home-fashioned bookcase with books and magazines. On the rear wall is the same colored print with the caption of the rising slave.*

ABE *is seated at a table near the front writing by a lighted lamp. He is better dressed and more alert than formerly. Further back and to the left of the fireplace sits* MUH MACK *dozing and quarreling in her rocking chair. Her head and face are hid under the same slat-bonnet, and a dirty pink "fascinator" is draped over her bony shoulders. Her huge snuff brush protrudes from her lips and now and then describes a sort of waving motion when she moves her jaws in sleep. Between her knees she clasps her walking-stick.*

Through the window at the rear come bright streaks from the orange afterglow of the west. The November sun has set and the sky near the horizon is fading into a deep gloom under an approaching cloudiness. In the oaks outside the sparrows going to roost pour

out a flooding medley of sharp calls resembling the heavy dripping of rain from eaves. For a moment ABE *continues his writing and then lays down his pencil and replenishes the fire. He returns to his chair and sits drumming absently on the table.*

ABE—When Goldie coming back, Muh?

His speech is gentle and more cultivated.

MUH MACK—[*Starting out of her sleep.*] Whut you say?

ABE—When Goldie coming back from Mr. Lonnie's?

MUH MACK—When she git done o' dat washing and arning, po' thing.

ABE—Seem like it's time she was back.

MUH MACK—Whut you keer 'bout her and you setting dere all day wuking at dat old speech mess.

ABE—You going to cook any supper?

MUH MACK—Supper! You ax dat and know I cain't git out'n my chaih wid de stiffness and misery. You'll hadder eat cold.

ABE—I've done looked. Ain't nothing cold.

MUH MACK—Den you'll hadder wait till she come. Po', po' thing, wid all her trouble wonder she able to cook or work or do anything.

She turns to her snoozing and ABE *picks up his pencil again and gnaws at it as he works on his speech. Soon he stops and begins tapping on the table.*

ABE—What trouble she got now?

MUH MACK—[*Astounded.*] You ax dat and you fixing to bring mo' trouble on us wid yo' schooling and mess. And wid Mr. Lonnie down on you 'bout de crap ag'in. Lawd, Lawd! And who dat won't let his po' boy putt foot in de home? Keep 'im driv' off lak a homeless dawg.

She wipes her eyes with a dirty rag.

ABE—You talk, but this time they won't be no failing. The school is going through. Then I can talk to Mr. Lonnie. Six men done already promised a thousand dollars. Cain't fail this time, nosuh.

MUH MACK—You don't 'serve nothing, and won't let po' Douglass come back to see his mammy. [*Brightly.*] Dem men mebbe ain't promised. Dey talking.

ABE—[*Sharply.*] I know. . . . You needn't say another word about it. [*Concerned with the speech.*] I won't let Douglass darken my door.

MUH MACK *stirs from her doze and sniffles into her rag, wiping the rheumy tears from her eyes.* ABE *turns to his writing. He writes more and more rapidly as he nears the end. Presently he throws down his pencil and stretches his arms back of his head with a weary yawn. He looks towards* MUH MACK *and speaks exultantly.*

ABE—That's the best I've ever done. They can't go against that, they can't this time.

MUH MACK—[*Sleepily, rubbing her eyes and speaking coldly.*] Thank God you's finished yo' speech and'll soon be outen my sight and I kin git a liddle nap.

ABE—[*Not noticing her.*] That crowd's going to listen to me to-night.

MUH MACK—Mebbe dey will, but you's talked yo' life away, and it hain't come to nothing.

ABE—[*Looking at the speech.*] I've done my best this time. All I got from books and experience is there, and the truth's in it. [*He gathers the closely written sheets together.*] I tell 'em—— [*He turns to his speech and begins to read as he rises from his chair.*] I say, ladies and gentlemen, [*He does not notice the movement of disgust* MUH MACK *makes as she turns away from him.*] this night is going to mean much in the lives of each and every one of us, big and little.

MUH MACK—Hit won't ef dey treats dey chil'en lak you treats yo' one.

ABE—[*Hurrying on.*] It marks the founding of the Cape Fair Training School, an institution that will one day be a light to other institutions around about. It is to be our aim here, with the few teachers and facilities we can provide, to offer education to the colored children amongst us and offer it cheap. [*He turns toward* MUH MACK *and speaks with more spirit, as if his audience were directly before him.*

But she turns her back to him and blinks in the fire.] Looking over the country, ladies and gentlemen, we see eight million souls striving in slavery, yea, slavery, brethren, the slavery of ignorance. And ignorance means being oppressed, both by yourselves and by others—hewers of wood and drawers of water.

He picks up his pencil and crosses out a word.

MUH MACK—[*Sarcastically.*] Dey hain't nobody been in slavery since de surrenduh. Ef dey is, how come? And I reckon de hewers o' woods and de drawers o' water is 'bout free as anybody.

ABE—[*Continuing his speech without noticing her.*] Ignorance means sin, and sin means destruction, destruction before the law and destruction in a man's own heart. The Negro will rise when his chareckter is of the nature to cause him to rise—for on that the future of the race depends, and that chareckter is mostly to be built by education, for it cannot exist in ignorance. Let me repeat again, ladies and gentlemen. We want our children and our grandchildren to march on towards full lives and noble charecksters, and that has got to come, I say, by education. We have no other way. We got to live and learn—and think, that's it. [*He strides in front of the old woman, who has dozed off again under his eloquence. She raises her head with a jerk when he thunders at her.*] A little over forty years ago the white man's power covered us like the night. Through

war and destruction we was freed. But it was freedom of the body and not freedom of the mind. And what is freedom of the body without freedom of the mind? It means nothing. It don't exist. [*Throwing his arm out in a long gesture.*] What we need is thinking people, people who will not let the body rule the head. And again I cry out, education. I been accused of wanting to make the Negro the equal of the white man. Been run from pillar to post, living in poverty because of that belief. But it is false. I never preached that doctrine. I don't say that the colored ought to be made equal to the white in society, now. We are not ready for it yet. But I do say that we have equal rights to educating and free thought and living our lives. With that all the rest will come. [*Pointing to the bookcase.*] Them books there show it. [*Caught up in the dreams of his life, he pours out a roll of words and beats the air with his fists.*] Ladies and gentlemen, what's to hinder us from starting a great center of learning here, putting our time and our hope and money and labor into it and not into the much foolishness of this life. What little education I got was by light 'ood knots, and after reading and studying all these years, I am just a little ways along. We must give the children of the future a better chance than we have had. With this one school-building we can make a good start. Then we can get more teachers later on, more equipment, and some day a library where the boys and girls can read about men that have done something for the world. And before many years pass we will be giving instruction

in how to farm, how to be carpenters, how to preach, how to teach, how to do anything. [*Forgetful of his written page, he shouts.*] And what will stop us in the end from growing into a great Negro college, a university, a light on a hill, a place the pride of both black and white. [*He stands a moment, lost in thought. Turning through the leaves of his speech, he looks towards* MUH MACK, *who sits hid under her bonnet.*] Ain't that the truth, Muh Mack? Ain't it? [*Anxiously.*] They can't stand out against that, can they? Ain't that a speech equal to the best of the white, ain't it?

He coughs.

MUH MACK—Lawd Jesus! You's enough to wake de daid. And you brung on yo' cough ag'in.

ABE—[*Fiercely.*] I tell you it's going through. I believe the people here are with me this time.

MUH MACK—Sounds like de same old tale. [*Bitterly.*] You's made dem dere speeches from Wilmington and Greensboro to I don' know where. It's foolishnesses, and you knows it. [ABE *arranges the leaves of his speech without listening to her.*] Time you's learning dat white is white and black is black, and Gohd made de white to allus be bedder'n de black. It was so intended from de beginning.

ABE—[*Staring at her and speaking half aloud.*] We been taught and kept believing that for two hundred

years. [*Blazing out.*] But it's a lie, a lie, and the truth ain't in it.

MUH MACK—[*Going on in her whining, irritating voice.*] Yeh, all yo' life you's hollered Lawd and followed Devil, and look whut it's brung you to. Ef you'd a putt as much time on picking cotton lately as you has on dat speech, you wouldn't have Mr. Lonnie down on you de way he is. De truf's in dat all right.

ABE—[*Trying to control his nervousness and anger.*] I ain't a farmer. My business is with schools. [*Hotly.*] Can't you learn nothing? You dribbling old ——, here for twenty years you've heard me talk the gospel and it ain't made no impression on you. [*He turns away, realizing the vanity of his words to her. He speaks to himself and the shadows of the room.*] That speech is so! It's so, and I got to speak it that-a-way. [*He looks about him with burning eyes and pleads as if with an unseen power.*] The truth's there. Can't you see it? [*His nostrils quiver and he goes on in a kind of sob, calling to the unbeliever hiding within the dark.*] God A'mighty knows they ain't no difference at the bottom. Color hadn't ought to count. It's the man, it's the man that lasts. [*Brokenly.*] Give us the truth! Give us the truth!

He coughs slightly, and a queer baffled look creeps over his face. For the moment he seems to sense ultimate defeat before a hidden, unreachable enemy.

MUH MACK—[*Looking at the clock and snap-*

ping.] Thought you's bound to be at de Quillie House by six o'clock. It's done near 'bout time. Git on. I wants my nap.

She pours snuff into her lip and turns to her snoozing again. With a hurried look at the clock, ABE *crams his speech into his pocket, gets a plug hat from the desk, and blows out the lamp. The room is filled with great leaping shadows from the darting flames of the fireplace.*

ABE—[*At the door.*] You remember what I said about Douglass.

MUH MACK—Git on, git on. [*Whining sarcastically.*] Sho' you'll be a light on de hill and de pride o' de land—and you won't even let a po' old woman see her boy.

ABE—[*Turning back.*] Damn him! If he puts his foot in this house he'd better not let me get hold of him. They ain't no man, flesh of my flesh or not, going to lie rotten with liquor and crooks around me. That's what I been talking against for twenty years. I drove him off for it and I'd do it again. Just because a little time's passed ain't no reason I've changed.

MUH MACK—He mought a changed and want to do bedder.

ABE—[*Coming back into the room.*] Changed enough so he like to got arrested in town yesterday and it his first day back.

MUH MACK—[*Pleading in a high quavering voice.*] But I gut to see him. He's been gone two yeah.

ABE—Let him come if he dares. You ruint him with your tales and wuthless guitar playing and I don't want nothing more to do with him.

MUH MACK—[*Mumbling to herself.*] I's gwine see him 'fo' he goes 'way back yander ef I has to crawl slam over de river.

ABE—[*With brightening eye.*] You heard me. He ain't no longer mine, and that's the end of it.

MUH MACK—[*Bursting into a rage.*] And yo' ain't none o' mine. You's gut all de high notions of old Colonel Mack and de white folks and don't keer nothing foh yo' own. Git on. [*He stands looking at the floor, hesitating over something.*] Whut you skeered of, de dark?

ABE—[*Shuddering and going across the room and getting an old overcoat from a nail.*] Yes, I'm afraid of it. You're right, I'm none of yours, nor my own mother either. You know what I am—no, I dunno whut I am. Sometime I think that's de trouble. [*Sharply.*] No, no, de trouble out there, around me, everywhere around me. [*The despondent look comes back to his face and he speaks more calmly.*] I'll cut across the fields the near way. And tell Goldie not to worry. I'll be back by ten with the school good as started. [*At the door he turns back again and calls to*

the old woman earnestly.] Muh Mack, don't let her worry, don't. [*But the old woman is asleep.*] Let her sleep, let us all sleep.

He goes out softly, closing the door behind him.

SCENE 6

AN *hour later the same evening. A sandy country road twists out of the gloom of scrubby oaks and bushes at the rear and divides into a fork, one branch turning sharply to the left and the other to the right. The moon has risen low in the east, casting a sickly drunken light over the landscape through the flying clouds. To the left in a field of small loblolly pines the dim outline of a barn can be seen. The tops and the branches of the larger trees move like a vast tangle of restless arms, and the small bushes and grasses hug the earth under the wind's blustering. Down the road in the distance come the sounds of running footsteps. And farther off, almost out of hearing, the halloo as of some one pursuing. The footsteps thump nearer, and presently* ABE *staggers up out of the darkness and falls panting in the edge of the bushes at the right. His hat is gone and his clothes torn. The shouts sound fainter in the night and gradually die away.*

ABE *crawls to his knees and stares back at the road, his breath coming in great gasps. His learning and pitiful efforts at cultural speech have dropped away like a worn-out garment and left him a criminal.*

ABE—Reckon, reckon dey leave me 'lone now, de damn cutth'oats! [*Holding his sides with his hands*

and rocking his head in pain.] Oh, my breast feel lak it'll bust. Yeh, I outrun you, you po' white trash. [*Clambering wildly to his feet and staring up the road.*] But you done fix me now. You done got all de underholt and lay me on de bottom. [*Looking up at the sky and raising his fist above his head.*] Dere dat moon looking on it all so peaceful lak. It don't know, it can't feel what dey done to me. [*Bursting out with a loud oath.*] God damn 'em to hell! Dem white sons of bitches! Dey don't gi' me no chance. Dey stop every crack, nail up every do' and shet me in. Dey stomp on me, squash me, mash me in de ground lak a worm. [*His voice breaking into a sob.*] Dey ain't no place foh me. I lost, ain't no home, no 'biding place. [*He throws himself down on the ground and lays his cheek to the earth. Unseen by him, a light begins to twinkle at the barn. He sits up and looks intently at the ground.*] Seem lak dis earf feel sweet to me. It warm me lak it feel sorry. [*Laying his hand on it as if it were a being.*] Ground, you is my last and only friend. You take me in, you keep me safe from trouble. Wisht I could dig me a hole now and cover me up and sleep till de great judgment day, and nobody never know whah I gone.

LONNIE MCCRANIE, *stout and middle-aged, comes in at left with a lantern.*

LONNIE—Heigh there!

ABE—[*Bounding up.*] Keep back, whoever you is. Stay back dere, white man.

LONNIE—[*Peering forward.*] Who's that cutting up crazy here in the night?

ABE—Ain't nobody, nobody.

LONNIE—Well, by God, Abe, what's the matter?

ABE—That you, Mr. Lonnie?

LONNIE—Yeh. What'n the world's the matter? I was out there at the barn and heard the awfulest racket. Somebody talking like they was crazy.

ABE—Trouble, Mr. Lonnie, trouble.

LONNIE—Trouble, what sort of trouble? [*Coming closer and holding up his light before* ABE.] Great goodness, you're wet as water.

ABE—[*Straightening up.*] I all right now. Got to go on.

He makes a drunken step on the road towards the right. LONNIE *gets quickly before him.*

LONNIE—Where you going?

ABE—I going to leave heah, going clean away.

LONNIE—No, you're not. Tell me what's the matter.

ABE—Dem white men run me away from the Quillie House.

LONNIE—That's what the shouting was about, was it?

ABE—Mebbe so, suh.

LONNIE—Uh-huh. You were down there 'bout your school business, anh?

ABE—I wa'n't doing no harm. I was going to talk to 'em 'bout our school foh next year, and when I got there dey was a crowd of low-down white men dere——

LONNIE—Look out, mind how you talk.

ABE—I minding all right. When I got there they done run them lazy niggers off and told me I had to go. [*Grimly.*] Dey couldn't skeer me though. I went on in de house and started my speech. And den—— [*Throwing out his arms wildly.*] Mr. Lonnie, help me git back at 'em. Help me git de law on 'em.

LONNIE—What'd they do?

ABE—Dey fell on me and beat me and told me I got to git out of de country. And dey run me off. But I reckon some of 'em got dey heads cracked. [*His body swaying with weakness.*] What I going to do? I don't know what?

LONNIE—Go on home and behave yourself.

ABE—[*His voice almost cracking.*] I ain't done nothing. I tell you.

LONNIE—[*Roughly.*] Serves you right. I've told you time and again to quit that messing about and look after your crop and keep in your place. But you

won't, you won't. I reckon you'll stay quiet now awhile.

ABE—[*Pleading with him.*] But I done right. I ain't done nothing to be beat foh.

LONNIE—The devil you ain't! I've been off to-day all around the country trying to get hands to pick out your cotton. It's falling out and rotting in the fields.

ABE—But I ain't lost no time from the cotton patch, 'cepting two or three days and I was sick den. I been sick all to-day.

LONNIE—You needn't talk back to me. If you're sick what are you doing out to-night and getting yourself beat half to death? Yeh, I reckon I know such tales as that. And you needn't fool with the crop no more. I done levied on it and am going to have it housed myself.

ABE—[*Moving towards him.*] You mean you tuck my crop away from me?

LONNIE—Don't talk to me like that, I tell you. [*A fit of coughing seizes* ABE.] Call it taking away from you if you want to. I'm done of you. Next year you can hunt another place.

ABE—[*His face working in uncontrollable rage.*] Den you's a damn thief, white man.

LONNIE—[*Yelling.*] Stop that!

ABE—[*Moving towards him.*] Now I'm going to pay somebody back. I going to git even.

LONNIE—Stop! I'll kill you with this lantern.

ABE—[*With a loud laugh.*] Yeh, yeh, hit me. Yo' time done come.

He makes a movement towards LONNIE, *who swings his lantern aloft and brings it crashing down on his head. The light goes out and the two rocking forms are seen gripping each other's throats under the moon.*

LONNIE—Let go—let go——

ABE *gradually crushes him down to the ground, choking him.*

ABE—[*Gnashing his teeth and snarling like a wild animal.*] I choke you, I choke yo' guts out'n yo' mouf. [*He finally throws* LONNIE'S *limp body from him, and then falls upon it, beating and trampling the upturned face.*] Dere you lie now. Dead! [*His voice trails high into a croon.*] I wipe out some de suffering of dis world now! [*Standing up and drawing away from the body.*] I—I—git even, I pay 'em back. [*He begins wiping his hands feverishly upon his trousers.*] Blood! Blood, de white man's blood all over me. [*Screaming out in sudden fear.*] I done kilt somebody! Oh, Lawd, Mr. Lonnie! Mr. Lonnie! [*He falls on his knees by the body.*] What's de matter? Wake up, wake up! . . . Pshaw, he's asleep, fooling. [*Springing to his feet.*] He's dead, dead. [*The wind groans through the trees like the deep note of some enormous fiddle and then dies*

away with a muffled boom across the open fields. ABE *stands frozen with horror.*] Listen at dat wind, will you! Mercy, dat his spirit riding it and crying! [*He falls prone upon the earth moaning and rocking. In a moment he sits up and holds his head tightly in his hands.*] O—oh, seem lak my head done turnt to a piece o' wood, seem lak cold as ice. [*He slaps his forehead queerly with his open palms.*] De whole world done seem turnt upside down, everything going round me lak a wheel. [*As he stares wonderingly around and gropes before him like one dreaming, the branches of the trees seem to change their characteristics and become a wild seething of mocking, menacing hands stretched forth from all sides at him. He snatches up a piece of broken fence rail and snarls at them.*] Don't tech me, I kill you! [*He stands in an attitude of defense and the branches seem to regain their normal appearance. Stupefied, he lets the rail fall to the ground and then wraps his arms spasmodically across his face.*] O Lawd, I going crazy, dat's what! [*He bends over jerking and shivering. Presently from the left he sees appear a shadowy cortege of raggle-taggle country gentry, men and boys carrying muskets, sticks and stones. Their faces, illumined by the moon, are set and frozen in the distortion of hate and revenge. In the midst of them is a young Negro being dragged along with a rope around his neck.* ABE *starts back with a gasp.*] What's dis? Whah am I? [*Suddenly terrified.*] Lawd, dat's a lynching! . . . It's de night o' dat lynching. And dat dere's Charlie—Charlie Samp-

son. [*Seizing the rail.*] What you white mens doing? [*Crying out.*] Dat you, Charlie! I come save you! [*The group appear to pass silently down the road at the rear, the prisoner throwing out his arms and clawing the air as he is dragged onward.* ABE *springs forward at them and swings his rail through the air. It lands on the ground with a thud. He shrieks.*] Ghosts! Dey's ha'nts! Dey ain't no peoples! [*Jerking up his head and looking queerly around him.*] Jesus, mebbe dat's me dey hanging! [*He stands rooted in his tracks as they disappear down the road. After a moment out of the underbrush at the left steal two shadowy figures dressed in the fashion of the late fifties. One is a young good-looking Negress of twenty, the other a dandified young white man about thirty. As they move across the scene at the rear, the man looks guiltily around him as if in fear of being surprised. The woman stops and points to the thicket at the right. He nods and motions her to move on.* ABE *looks up and sees them stealing away. He leaps to his feet and stares at them in stupefaction.*] Who dat 'oman and white man? [*With a joyous cry he rushes forward.*] Mammy! Mammy! Dat you! Dis heah's Abe, yo' boy! Mammy! [*The figures begin entering the thicket.*] Mammy! Dat you, Colonel Mack? Whah you going? Stay heah, help me, I—— [*The man and the woman disappear in the bushes.* ABE *stands with his mouth open, staring after them.*] Whut's all dis? Must be anudder dream —a dream. Sump'n' quare. [*He moves cautiously forward and parts the bushes and starts back with a*

loud oath.] God damn 'em! Dey dere lak hawgs! [*The fearful truth breaks upon him and he shrieks.*] Stop it! Stop dat, Mammy, Colonel Mack! [*Rushing towards the bushes again and stopping as if spellbound.*] Stop dat, I tell you, dat's me! Dat's me!

He stumbles backward over the body of LONNIE MC CRANIE *and, shrieking, rushes down the road at the left.*

SCENE 7

THIRTY *minutes later.* DOUGLASS *has arrived and with* MUH MACK *before the fire is giving an account of his travels. He is now about nineteen years old, and has developed into a reckless dissipated youth, dressed in the cheap flashy clothes of a sport.*

DOUGLASS—[*Turning towards* MUH MACK *with a bitter smile.*] Yeh, I says it and I says it ag'in. Let dem dere Norveners putt Pap in print foh what he's trying to do foh de niggers. Ef dey could see him now down a po' dirt fahmer dey'd not think he's such a sma't man. Let him read his books and git new ide's. Dey won't change de nigger in him, not by a damn sight. He's raght down working a tenant and dat's where he belongs. Git me? Ah, him off to-night making his speeches. I bet to Christ dis heah's his last 'un.

MUH MACK—Foh God's sake don' carry on so. Come on and tell me some mo' 'bout de places you been since you left heah. [*He sits looking in the fire.*] Whut—whut's de matter? You hain't been usual so ficey-lak wid yo' pap. You been drinking?

DOUGLASS—[*Laughing sweetly.*] Yeh, I been drinking. And I gut cause to cuss de whole works out. [*Looking at her fiercely.*] Listen heah. Let dis

slip in yo' yur, foh you'd heah it soon enough. You never has swung a' eight-pound hammer, steel driving day adder day in the br'iling sun, has you? And you hain't never done it wid a ball and chain on you ca'se you is marked dang'us, has you? and dat foh a whole yeah long? Well, I has.

MUH MACK—[*In astonishment.*] You been on de roads since you left?

DOUGLASS—[*Recklessly.*] I has dat and wo' de convict clo'es des' ca'se in my drunkenness I 'gun to preach some o' his doctrines 'bout dere being no difference 'twixt de cullud and de white. I knowed bedder. But I was drunk and had hearn so many o' his speeches. De judge said he'd des' stop my mouf foh a month. And I gut a knife one day and stabbed a gyard to de hollow. And dey gin me twelve months foh dat.

MUH MACK—[*Admiring his prowess.*] You allus was one whut fou't at de drap o' de hat.

DOUGLASS—[*Disgustedly.*] Yeh, a damn fool, and I ain't fohgit how he run me off'n heah and beat me! [*Bursting out with shining eyes.*] Hain't I gut cause to hate him and want to git him down?

MUH MACK—Gittin' on de roads ain't much, Douglass.

DOUGLASS—No, it ain't much to lie in de jug, is it? You do it and you ain't never gwine have no more peace. De cops is allus watching you. You gits de

look and dey knows you. Dey tried to 'rest me yistiddy over dere, and I hadn't done nothing. And de old man was knowing to it too. But I's learnt what he'll never learn and it's dis—dat we belongs down wid de pick and de sludge hammer and de tee-arn and de steam shovel, and de heavy things—at de bottom doing de dirty work foh de white man, dat's it. And he ain't gwine stand foh us to be educated out'n it nuther. He's gwine keep us dere. It pays him to. I sees it. And adder all dese yeahs Pap keeps on trying to teach dat men is men. Some white man's gwine shoot his lights out one dese days, see ef dee don't. [*With a reckless forgetfulness.*] And so I says gimme a fast time, a liddle gin to drown down all my troubles in, and den—— [*He goes over to the door and gets his guitar.*] A liddle music to top it off wid. How about it, Muh Mack?

MUH MACK—[*Straining her eyes through the shadows.*] Whut you gut dere? [*Jubilantly.*] Lawd, Lawd! Ef you ain't brung yo' box wid you! And I ain't heerd nothing but dem sporrers by de do' and dat old rain crow in de hollow since you left two yeah back. Play her, boy, play her.

By this time he has sat down by the fire strumming.

DOUGLASS—[*Tuning up while* MUH MACK *sits in a quiver of excitement.*] Lemme play yo' old piece. My 'oman in Rocky Mount said 'twas de onliest chune.

MUH MACK—Dat's it! Dat's it! Lawd, gimme de

"Band." I useter be put in de middle every time foh dat step. Dance all day, dance all night, des' so I's home by de broad daylight. Chile, I c'd natch'ly knock de wool off'n 'em.

As DOUGLASS *plays she chuckles and whines with delight and almost rises from her seat. He starts in a quiet manner gradually working up to a paroxysm of pantomime and song.* MUH MACK *begins doing the Jonah's Band Party step with her heels and toes while sitting.* DOUGLASS *spreads his wriggling feet apart, leans forward with closed eyes, and commences the "call," with the old woman's quavery slobbering voice giving the "sponse."*

CALL: Sech a kicking up san'!

SPONSE: Jonah's ban'!

This is repeated; then comes the command to change steps.

"Hands up, sixteen, and circle to de right,
We's gwine git big eatings heah to-night.

"Sech a kicking up san'! Jonah's Ban'!
Sech a kicking up san'! Jonah's Ban'!

"Raise yo' right foot, kick it up high,
Knock dat Mobile buck in de eye.

"Sech a kicking up san'! Jonah's Ban'!
Sech a kicking up san'! Jonah's Ban'!

"Stan' up, flat-foot. Jump dem bars.
Karo backwards lak a train o' cyars.

"Sech a kicking up san'! Jonah's Ban'!
Sech a kicking up san'! Jonah's Ban'!

"Dance roun', 'oman, show 'em de p'int,
Dem yudder coons don'ter how to coonj'int."

By this time DOUGLASS *is playing a tattoo on the wood of his box and carrying on the tune at the same time.* MUH MACK *has risen from her chair. With her dress to her knees, defying her years, she cuts several of the well-remembered steps. At sight of her bare and thin dry shanks the delirious* DOUGLASS *bursts into loud mocking guffaws and only plays faster.*

The door opens at the right and GOLDIE *comes timidly in. Her face is worn and haggard, and the strained vacant look in her eyes has deepened.* MUH MACK *stops and creeps guiltily to her chair.* DOUGLASS *tapers off his music and stops. For a moment* GOLDIE *stands astonished in the door, holding a bulky tow-sack in her hand. She drops the sack and hurries over to* DOUGLASS.

GOLDIE—Muhcy me! I knowed 'twas you soon's I heard de guitar. And sech carrying-ons!

DOUGLASS—[*Rising confusedly as she comes up to him.*] How you, Mam?

She puts her hand shyly on his arm and then clings convulsively to him, her shoulders heaving with restrained sobs. He lays one arm around her and stands

looking tenderly and somewhat foolishly down at her. It is evident that in his way he cares for her. She suddenly raises her head, dries her eyes with her apron, and fetches wood from the box.

GOLDIE—[*Punching the fire.*] Whyn't you let me know Douglass'd come, Muh Mack?

MUH MACK—He des' come.

DOUGLASS—[*Laying his box on the bed.*] Mam, you set in dis char. You must be cold.

She sits down wearily, and he stands with his back to the fire. MUH MACK *picks up her snuff-brush and slyly begins to dip from her tin box.*

GOLDIE—[*With a sudden start of terror.*] You hain't seed yo' pap, has you?

DOUGLASS—No'm, I ain't seed 'im. I found out he done gone to de Quillie House 'fo' I come. I slipped in heah and found Muh Mack asleep. Lawd, I skeahed her wid a fiah coal.

GOLDIE—[*Suddenly reaching out and clutching his hand to her face.*] Don't you and yo' pap have no trouble. Don't agg him on. He—he—ain't well and might rile easy. We—we kin see one 'nother off.

DOUGLASS—Oh, I'se gwine be partickler. Now don't worry no mo'. It's awright.

GOLDIE—[*Slowly getting up.*] You all set while I fix you some supper. I got something good foh Abe

and de rest of us. Lemme show you. [*She brings the bag, sits down in the chair and takes out a big meaty ham-bone.* MUH MACK *eyes it hungrily. Naïvely.*] Ain't dat de finest dough? And I gut a hawg haid, too, and collards and cracklings.

DOUGLASS—[*Angrily.*] Dat's de way wid dem damn—wid dem white folks. Dey works you to death and den shoves dey old skippery meat off on you foh pay.

GOLDIE—[*A worried look coming over her face.*] You hadn't ort to say dat, Douglass. Mr. Lonnie gi'n me it—all of it. And he paid me cash foh my work. Abe'll have a new bottle o' medicine Monday. [*She fingers the food childishly, and* DOUGLASS *turns away with a smothered oath. Putting the food back into the bag, she stands up.*] Now I'll git you some supper.

DOUGLASS—I cain't stay foh no supper. I promised to eat down de road wid Joe Day. Le's set and talk, ca'se we don't have much time and you can cook adder I'm gone.

GOLDIE—[*Hesitating.*] Well—lemme put dese heah in de kitchen den.

She goes out at the right.

DOUGLASS—[*Turning sharply to* MUH MACK.] What's de matter wid Mam?

MUH MACK—Won't we des' a-having of a time when she broke in?

DOUGLASS—Cut out de damn jowing. What makes Mam act so quare?

MUH MACK—[*Surprised.*] Do how? She acts awright.

DOUGLASS—She don't. She acts sort o' lost lak—wropped up in something.

He scratches his head perplexed.

MUH MACK—Ef dey's anything wrong wid her it's 'count o' trouble, I reckin.

DOUGLASS—De hell-fi'ed fool! He's drug her to death wid his wildishness.

MUH MACK—And ef it's trouble dat ails her, I reckins as how you's done yo' shur in bringing it on.

He swallows his reply as GOLDIE *comes in. She lights the lamp, then sits down and begins staring in the fire.*

DOUGLASS—[*After turning from one side to the other.*] Mammy, whut's de matter wid you?

GOLDIE—[*Brushing her hand across her face and looking up as she wipes the tears from her eyes.*] Lawd bless you, chile, dey ain't nothing. I's des' happy to be wid you.

She catches his hand and holds it a moment, then

drops it and begins to look in the fire again. DOUGLASS *watches her intently a moment and then turns away as if somewhat awed by her manner. There is a noise of some one's coming up on the porch.*

MUH MACK—[*Crying out in fear.*] Dat's him, Douglass! I knows his step. Dat's yo' pap.

GOLDIE *stands up, wringing her hands and crying silently as* DOUGLASS *gets his guitar and hurries into the kitchen. The door at the left opens and* ABE *enters.*

GOLDIE—[*Leaning forward and rousing the fire.*] Did everything turn out—— [MUH MACK *suddenly screams.* GOLDIE *looks up and cries out.*] Oh!

ABE *comes towards the fire. His face is bruised, his clothes torn to shreds, and he sways as he walks.*

MUH MACK—[*Rising from her chair.*] Dey's been adder him! Dey's been adder him!

ABE—[*Snarling at her.*] Shet up yo' damn yowling, will you? and don't be rousing de neighborhood. I'm not dying yit.

GOLDIE *stands a moment terror-stricken and then runs up to him.*

GOLDIE—You's hurt, hurt bad, Abe, po' baby!

ABE—[*Pushing her back.*] Ain't hurt much. No time to doctor me now. [*He stands before the fire.* MUH

MACK *collapses in her chair. He is no longer the reformer and educator, but a criminal, beaten and hunted.*] I come to tell you to git away—[*Panting.*] to—to leave, leave!

GOLDIE—[*Sobbing and burying her face in her hands.*] Whut's happened! Whut's happened!

MUH MACK—[*Swaying in her chair and crying to herself.*] Lawdy-a-muhcy on us! Lawd-a-muhcy!

For a moment he stands before the women silent, with closed eyes.

ABE—[*Looking at the motto on the wall and repeating the words dully.*] We are rising! [*Echoing.*] We are rising!—He didn't know what he said, he didn't. [*He staggers and grips the mantel and stands listening as if to far-away sounds. He turns desperately to the cowering women.*] Git your clothes and leave. You got to go, I tell you everything's finished at de end.

GOLDIE—[*Wailing.*] What happened at de schoolhouse?

ABE—[*Pushing his bruised hand across his forehead.*] I cain't, cain't quite think—yeh, they was a crowd of white men at de door with dough-faces over their faces. Said wa'n't going to be no meeting. Dey beat me, run me off. And dey give me till to-morrow to git outen de country. You got to git away, foh it's worse'n dat—oh, it is! [*Calmly and without bitterness.*] Who you reckon set 'em on me? Who you

think it was told 'em about de trouble I been in before? Yeh, and he made it out terribler'n it was. Douglass told 'em. . . . He done it. My own flesh and blood. No! No! he was but ain't no more! [*Gloomily.*] But I don't blame him—dey ain't no blaming nobody no longer.

GOLDIE—[*Fiercely.*] He didn't—he wouldn't turn ag'in' his own pa.

ABE—[*Sternly.*] Hush! He did though. But it don't matter to-night. And you got to leave. [*Half screaming and tearing at the mantel.*] Now! Now, I tell you.

GOLDIE—[*Between her sobs.*] Did you—who hurt you?

ABE—I tell you I've done murder, and dey coming for me.

MUH MACK *sits doubled up with fear, her head between her arms. With a sharp gasp* GOLDIE *ceases weeping and sits strangely silent.*

MUH MACK—Murder! Oh, Lawd-a-muhcy!

She mumbles and sobs in her rag.

ABE—Dey drove me away from de meeting. I come back by the road mad. [*He gasps.*] Every white man's hand ag'in' me to de last. And Mr. Lonnie come out to de road when I passed his house and begun to abuse me about de crop. He struck at me,

and I went blind all of a sudden and hit him wid my fist. Den we fou't. [*His voice growing shrill.*] And I hit him and hit him. I beat his head in. I killed him dead, dead! I beat on and on until all de madness went out of me and de dark was everywhere. Den I seed a sight—— [*He stops, aghast at the remembrance.*] I left him dere in de night dead on de ground. Dey done found 'im—I heah 'em crying up dere in de night. Dey's coming to git me. [*He holds out his bruised hands.*] His blood's still shining on dem hands.

He turns his head away in fear.

MUH MACK—[*In a high whine of terror.*] My God a-mighty! You kilt yo' own flesh!

ABE—[*Turning wrathfully upon her.*] Yeh, yeh, some bitch went a-coupling wid a white man! And I seed it—seed it! [*He drops his hands helplessly. A sort of terror comes upon him.*] Oh, Lawd God! I'm anudder Cain. I tell you I—I scrushed his head in and beat it till I put out de stars wid blood. Mercy! Mercy! [*With his hands still held before him, he stands with bowed head. After a moment he looks up and speaks calmly, almost resignedly, his dignity coming back to him.*] This is the way it was meant to be, and I'm glad it's ended. [*He stands with his fists to his temples, and then flings out his arms in a wide gesture.*] Oh, but damn 'em! Don't dey know I want to do all for de best. [*Shaking his fist at the shadows.*] I tell you, I tell you I wanted—I've tried

to make it come right. [*Lowering his head.*] And now it's come to dis.

DOUGLASS *comes in from the kitchen and stands away before him, his face filled with shame and fear.* ABE *looks at him without interest.*

DOUGLASS—Befo' God, Pap, I—I didn't mean no sech happenings. I never thought——

ABE—[*Eyeing him coldly.*] Who you? [*More loudly.*] A leader, a king among men! [*To the women.*] Here's Douglass and you can go wid him.

DOUGLASS *turns back into the kitchen and instantly runs out. His eyes are staring with fear.*

DOUGLASS—[*In a throaty whisper.*] Come on, Mam! [*Twisting his cap in terror.*] Dey's coming. I heerd 'em from de kitchen do'. Dey's coming. Run, Pap! God have muhcy!

MUH MACK *hobbles to him and tries to pull him through the door at the right. He looks back towards his mother.*

MUH MACK—Come on! Come on!

DOUGLASS—Mam, Mam, don't stay heah!

ABE—[*Raising* GOLDIE *from her chair.*] Go on wid him. You ain't to blame foh nothing.

He pushes her towards DOUGLASS. *But she turns and throws her arms around him, clinging silently to his breast.*

MUH MACK—[*Pulling* DOUGLASS.] I heahs 'em. Dat's dem coming.

With an anxious look at GOLDIE, DOUGLASS *hurries with* MUH MACK *through the door and into the fields.* ABE *places* GOLDIE *back in her chair and stands looking at her. He catches her by the shoulders and shakes her.*

ABE—Tell me, what is it, Goldie! What ails you, gal? [*She sits looking dumbly at him and he draws away from her. Presently there is a sound of stamping feet outside, and voices slip in like the whispering of leaves. A stone is thrown against the house, then another and another. One crashes through the window and strikes the lamp. The room is left in semi-darkness.* ABE *with a sob of overwhelming terror falls upon his knees. Twisting his great hands together, he casts up his eyes and cries in a loud voice.*] God, God, where is you now! Where is you, God! [*He begins half sobbing and chanting.*] You has helped befo', help me now. Is you up dere? Heah my voice! [*Fear takes possession of him.*] Blast me, Lawd, in yo' thunder and lightning, if it is yo' will! Ketch me away in de whirlwind, foh I'm a sinner. Yo' will, yo' will, not mine. Let fiah and brimstone burn me to ashes and scatter me on de earf. [*Gasping.*] I've tried, I've tried to walk de path, but I'm po' and sinful. . . . Give me peace, rest—rest in yo' bosom—if it is dy will. Save me, Jesus, save me!

He falls sobbing to the floor.

VOICE—[*Outside.*] Come out of there, you dirty nigger! [*A shudder runs through him, and his sobs grow less violent.*] Come out! Come out!

Another stone crashes through the room. As if ashamed of his weakness, ABE *rises from the floor. He speaks firmly to the shadows.*

ABE—In the end it was so intended. [*Looking around him.*] And I end here where I begun. [*He bursts out in a loud voice.*] Yet they're asleep, asleep, and I can't wake 'em!

VOICES—

He's in there.

I hear him talking.

He's done talking now, goddam him!

We'll show him the law all right.

He's got a gun!

Shoot him like a dog.

ABE—[*Wiping his brow and again speaking in the rôle of the educator trying to convince his everlastingly silent hearers.*] But they'll wake up, they'll wake—a crack of thunder and deep divided from deep—a light! A light, and it will be! [GOLDIE *still sits hunched over in her chair. As he speaks he goes to the door at the left.*] We got to be free, freedom of the soul and of the mind. Ignorance means sin and sin means destruction. [*Shouting.*] Freedom! Free-

dom! [*Lifting up his voice.*] Yea, yea, it was writ, "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. . . ." Lak de wind wid no home. Ayh, ayh, nigger man, nigger man—— [*He opens the door.*] I go talk to 'em, I go meet 'em——

VOICE—Hell! Lookout! There he is!

ABE—Yea, guns and killings is in vain. [*He steps out on the porch.*] What we need is to—to— [*His words are cut short by a roar from several guns. He staggers and falls with his head in the doorway.*] —and we must have—have——

At the sound of the guns, GOLDIE *springs to her feet. For an instant everything is still. Then several shots are fired into* ABE'S *body.*

VOICE—Quit the shooting. He's dead as a damned door! Now everybody get away from here—no talking, no talking. Keep quiet—quiet.

There is the sound of shuffling footsteps and men leaping the fence. Voices come back into the room.

VOICES—

Yeh, mum's it.

He won't raise no more disturbances!

The voices grow more faint.

What a bloody murder he done!

He's still now, by God!

It's the only way to have peace, peace.

Peace, by God!

GOLDIE *moves towards the door where* ABE *lies. Halfway across the room she stops and screams and then drops down beside his body.*

The wind blows through the house setting the sparks flying.

THE END

THE FIELD GOD

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

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BY PAUL GREEN

ACTS AND SCENES

ACT I

The yard and rear part of the Gilchrist house.
A summer evening.

ACT II

SCENE 1. *Same as Act I. A day in the following winter.*
SCENE 2. *The sitting-room in the Gilchrist house. Night of the same day.*

ACT III

SCENE 1. *Same as Act I. An afternoon the following June.*
SCENE 2. *Same as Scene 2, Act II. Nearly a year later.*
(During this scene the curtain will be lowered to denote the passing of several hours)

TIME: *Within the first decade of the twentieth century.*

PLACE: *A farm in eastern North Carolina.*

CHARACTERS

HARDY GILCHRIST—*a farmer.*
ETTA GILCHRIST—*his wife.*
RHODA CAMPBELL—*Mrs. Gilchrist's niece.*
NEILL SYKES—*a young farm-hand to Gilchrist.*
MAG, LONIE } *two old farm women, day laborers.*
JACOB ALFORD—*an old farm helper.*
SION ALFORD—*his son.*
OLD MARGARET—*a neighbor.*
TWO WOMEN—*neighbors.*
A PREACHER.

ACT I

THE *scene is the back-yard and rear-part of the* GILCHRIST *farmhouse.*

The one-storey house with a chimney at the end projects into the yard from the right rear. A narrow porch, about eighteen inches above the ground, with small two-by-four posts for columns, runs the length of it. Near the left end is a door opening back into the kitchen, and about ten feet farther up the porch to the right a door leads back into the dining-room. Over to the left front a small outhouse with a door in the center projects into the yard. A short log drum before it serves as a step. A clothes-line stretches from the outhouse across the yard to the column at the end of the porch where a water-shelf with a basin and bucket is built. A soap gourd is nailed to the column, and higher up a towel hangs on a nail. A farm-bell caps the top of a pole by the water-shelf, a wire hanging down for ringing. Farther to the front of the outhouse is a clumpy china tree with a wash-bench and two wooden tubs beneath it. In the yard at the center front are two large iron wash-pots with a pile of brown ashes and charred pieces of wood around them. And to the right of these is a well, boarded up to the height of a man's waist, a bucket and chain hanging from a wheel and cross-piece above. The

yard is bare save for a few straggling bunches of footworn grass here and there. Between the end of the outhouse and the house an open space gives a view of GILCHRIST'S *wide cottonfields.*

A summer evening is coming down over the GILCHRIST *farm. The sun has set, and beyond the rim of pines that enclose the level fields to the west the sky burns with a great smouldering flame, and the evening star hangs up above the circle of the sky's glow. From behind the house come the sounds of flapping wings and cackling of chickens going to roost, and somewhere down the lane the muffled bark of a dog is heard. In this immensity of silent fields a Negro on his way home gives his quavering lonely yodel, bursting now and then into a high snatch of song*—"You kin bury me in de east, you kin bury me in de west . . ." *reaches his cabin and is silent. A wagon passes on the road before the house, off to the right, the teamster cracking his whip and complaining to his team.*

The GILCHRIST *household is at supper in the dining-room. The door is open and the room is lighted by a lamp on the table.* HARDY GILCHRIST *sits at the end of the table with his back to the door.* MRS. GILCHRIST, *a pale, dark-eyed elderly woman, is at the opposite end facing* GILCHRIST. NEILL SYKES, *at* GILCHRIST'S *right, is eating in huge mouthfuls and washing down his food with buttermilk. He is a heavy-set muscular young fellow of twenty-six or seven.* MAG *and* LONIE, *two scarred*

and weatherbeaten old creatures, sit at the left. MAG *is stout and talkative;* LONIE, *her sister, is a little silent, bent old woman with a wizened drawn face.*

GILCHRIST—Have something else, Neill.

NEILL—[*Crossing his knife and fork on his plate and pushing back his chair.*] No-a-thanky. I ain't et so much in I don't know when. Them was good biscuits, Mis' Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*With a look out of her great gaunt eyes.*] Thanky, Neill.

MAG—[*Passing her cup.*] I'd choose a little more coffee, please ma'am. Takes a lot of moist to run a hoe-hand this hot weather.

She pulls up her apron and wipes her streaming brow.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Have some more, Lonie? [LONIE *is picking timidly at a bone and only shakes her gray head without looking up.*] You, Hardy?

GILCHRIST—Got all I want, thanky. [*He crosses his knife and fork, clears his throat and wipes his lips with his handkerchief.*] Like you, Neill, I've overdone it to-night. But if you want a steam-engine to run you've got to fire it, hanh?

NEILL—[*Rising and coming out on the porch.*] Right. And I've done more work to-day than any steam-engine I knows of.

He sits down on the edge of the porch, picking his teeth with a goose-quill pick, and gazing across the fields.

GILCHRIST—[*Breaking into a loud boyish laugh, and looking around.*] You have that. You've slayed the crab-grass this day, my boy. That bottom corn's a-r'aring this very minute.

NEILL—[*Taking a plug of tobacco from his pocket and biting off a chew.*] I bet so.

GILCHRIST—Grow! It'll grow if we have rain. [*Teasingly.*] In a few years, Neill, maybe you'll be able to keep sight of me in the field. [*Laughing again.*] You're a little young and tender yet. [*Bringing his hand down on the table so that the dishes rattle and* LONIE *drops her bone.*] Go to it, you Mag and Lonie! To-morrow's another day, and you'll need all you can hold.

MAG—Lord, Mr. Hardy, looks like you'd be tired adder your day's work. You're spry as a spring gander.

GILCHRIST—Tired! Take all the mules in Black River township to plow me down. Mag, you're getting old, old like a frost-bit 'simmon.

MAG—G'wan, Mr. Hardy, allus a-teasing. Old? Muh lived to be ninety. I got forty year to go yit.

GILCHRIST—I hope you got fifty of 'em, sixty—yea, seventy for that matter, Mag. I wisht you could

live forever, wisht all of us could. [*He lapses into silence and sits drumming on the table.* MRS. GILCHRIST *glances sharply at him. He looks up.*] How you feeling to-night, Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—About as common, I reckon.

GILCHRIST—[*Kindly.*] That hurting in your breast eased off any?

MRS. GILCHRIST—A little, not much.

GILCHRIST—[*Moodily.*] Ah, that's bad, bad. But that Rhody of yours coming down from Durham will take some of the work off'n you.

MAG—Mr. Hardy, you better go up to Raleigh and git Mis' Etta one o' old Miss Smith's plasters. That'll bring whatever it is gnawing in there to a head.

GILCHRIST—Don't reckon Miss Smith can do much if the doctors can't.

As if stung by some untoward remembrance he stands up and walks out on the porch. In the lamplight his face and figure are visible. He is a tall well-built man of thirty-five or forty, broad-shouldered and powerfully muscled. His face is etched and lined with the marks of exposure to rain and wind and sun. From beneath the grimness of his manner and the will that shows in his countenance a sort of irrepressible boyishness now and then breaks through. He goes to the water-shelf at the end of the porch and takes a drink of water. With the dipper in his hand he stares at the west and then up at the sky above.

NEILL—Looks right nice—out there.

GILCHRIST—Looks dry though. No sign of falling weather.

NEILL—[*Spitting in the yard.*] Hanh, not much, Mr. Hardy. But that snake I hung up in the bottom may fetch it.

GILCHRIST—[*Going into the kitchen and returning with a cheroot which he lights.*] I'd like to see them cotton rows out there standing full of water, Neill. . . . Have a smoke?

He sits down on the edge of the porch before the kitchen door.

NEILL—'Twould be fine, shore. We need it. . . . No a-thanky.

In the dining-room MAG *and* LONIE *continue their eating.* MRS. GILCHRIST *sits with her chin resting on her hand gazing vacantly before her.*

GILCHRIST—I heard raincrows hollering this morning too.

NEILL—Mought a-been a' old turkle-dove.

GILCHRIST—A raincrow. I've heard too many of 'em not to know.

NEILL—Yeh.

He leans his head wearily against a porch column. GILCHRIST *looks at him slyly.*

GILCHRIST—[*Chuckling.*] Tired, Neill?

NEILL—[*Jerking up his head.*] Hunh—me? No sir-ee.

GILCHRIST—Tired.

NEILL—Well, a fellow do get sorter sleepy-like adder a heavy meal like what I et.

GILCHRIST—Come on now, you're broke down, ain't you?

NEILL—This here has been a hard day. Hot, Lord, you could cook a' egg in the furrow about two o'clock. Yeh, I'll give in, Mr. Hardy, you just about plowed me to death to-day.

GILCHRIST—[*Gleefully.*] That so? Come on, come on, a great big fellow like you let an old man kill you at work. And I'd already sided half a' acre when you got to the fields this morning.

NEILL—"Old fellow," the dog's foot! You ain't old.

GILCHRIST—[*Mockingly.*] Old, old I am. Why I can remember back and 'way, 'way back.

NEILL—You ain't forty yit.

GILCHRIST—Don't lack but a year of it, Neill. And you ain't but twenty-five.

NEILL—Twenty-six 'cording to Muh's Bible.

GILCHRIST—Just a boy. [*Reaching playfully over*

and touching NEILL'S *cheek.*] Hunh, he ain't never stropped his razor yet.

NEILL—[*Grinning.*] Pshaw, my beard's grow worse'n a turkey gobbler's.

GILCHRIST *suddenly tumbles over from the porch in a handspring. He jumps to his feet shuffling a jig.*

MAG—[*Who has pushed herself back from the table along with* LONIE.] Lord, Lord, listen to Mr. Hardy out there.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Still looking before her.*] Mag, I wish you wouldn't use the Lord's name that-a-way.

MAG—But he's jest sich a case.

GILCHRIST—Can you do that, Neill?

NEILL—I ain't no good at tricks.

GILCHRIST—[*Spitting.*] Tricks! [*Exercising his arms.*] Muscle power, Neill. [*Slapping himself.*] In here and here and here. I hope it'll be a hundred year giving out. [*Soberly.*] But threescore and ten is all we're promised, Neill, and most of the time them promises don't hold good at that. [*Rising suddenly and going to the dining-room door.*] Mag, you and Lonie clean up the dishes, Mis' Etta's wore out to-night.

MRS. GILCHRIST—No, no, they've chopped cotton hard all day. I'll wash the dishes.

GILCHRIST—No, let them wash 'em. I'll add a little extry to your day's work, Mag. [*Gently.*] Come and sit out on the porch awhile, Etta. That dining-room's hot as a furnace.

He takes a chair out for her.

MAG—Yeh, we'll wash the dishes, Mis' Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST *rises and lights a lamp from a table in the corner and passes through a partition door into the kitchen. Through the open kitchen porch door a cupboard, stove and cooking utensils are seen.* MAG *and* LONIE *begin clearing away the dishes and passing into the kitchen with them.* MRS. GILCHRIST *throws a shawl over her shoulders, comes out on the porch and sits down. She takes out her snuff brush and box and begins dipping.*

GILCHRIST—Etta, I've told you about working at that hot stove the way you do. Wisht you'd quit it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Nobody else to.

GILCHRIST—I can get Sandy's gal back if you'd let me.

MRS. GILCHRIST—I don't want that Negro girl in the same house with me.

GILCHRIST—Why?

MRS. GILCHRIST—I believe she steals—and—and—she's low-down——

GILCHRIST—The first I've ever heard—well——

NEILL—I never heard nothing ag'in' her as a nigger.

MRS. GILCHRIST—I don't want her around.

GILCHRIST—[*Looking at her sharply.*] What you mean, Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Nervously.*] I—I couldn't stand her uppity ways.

NEILL—[*Whistling through his teeth.*] Mebbe her good looks made her uppity.

MRS. GILCHRIST—I've seen things about her I didn't like, I tell you.

GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly.*] Anh!

MRS. GILCHRIST—What is it, Hardy?

GILCHRIST—Nothing.

MRS. GILCHRIST—But now that Rhoda's coming from Durham to live with us, I won't need any help. I can get along.

NEILL—When's she coming, Mis' Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—Any time now.

GILCHRIST—[*Striking his thigh with his fist.*] Great goodness!

MRS. GILCHRIST—Hardy!

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up and walking back and forth in the yard.*] Nothing, Etta. [*He goes to the left at the end of the house and stands gazing out at*

his growing cotton.] Be having blooms out there, Neill, before the nineteenth of June. Grown squares on it now.

NEILL—Boll weevils'll be stirring soon too.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Who has been watching* GILCHRIST.] We got a letter in the mail yesterday from Rhoda and she said she'd come soon's she could git her pore muh's things straightened out. She may come to-morrow or next day or she may not come till next week. I wouldn't have been surprised to see her come to-day.

NEILL—Wonder how she'll take to the farm?

GILCHRIST—[*Turning back into the yard.*] Nohow, that's how. Anybody's been living in a town all their life ain't no use out here, I guess.

NEILL—Bet it'll be lonesome for her here.

GILCHRIST—She won't find no bathtubs and shining lights here and great crowds jostling and jamming. No, she won't by a long sight. I give her just a week to learn there's just one place she hates worse'n a farm and that's the place the good preacher's talk so much about.

NEILL—What place is that, Mr. Hardy? Hahhah.

GILCHRIST—It's the place Etta and the good folks around here say I'm going to. I ain't baptized and I don't go to church.

NEILL—Reckon I'll be right there trying to far the b'ilers fast as you can. 'Twouldn't seem natural if we weren't trying to outdo each other.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Neill!

NEILL—Course, Mis' Etta, we hadn't ort to joke about scripture matters, I reckon.

GILCHRIST—[*Sitting again on the edge of the porch and puffing his cheroot.*] According to the Book I guess I'll go there all right, me being an infidel and all, but I ain't done nothing particular wrong as I know of. [*Thumping his chest.*] I'm not condemned in here.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Hardy!

GILCHRIST—[*Turning and looking directly at* MRS. GILCHRIST.] From people's talk I know they suspicion things about me. [*Smiling grimly.*] Anh, it worries 'em because they can't find nothing against me.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Agitated.*] No, Hardy, it don't neither. People respect you everywhere, all but your religious notions.

NEILL—That they do. They swear by you up and down the country.

GILCHRIST—[*Fixing* NEILL *with his eye.*] Neill, people are quare. They look up to me around here, do they? I'm honest, I work hard, I've accumulated property—some. And yet half this neighborhood

would be glad to-morrow to hear I'd done something awful. It's not because I don't join in with 'em at the church and sing, and shout at meeting and be like the rest of 'em. You know what's in folks, Neill, that makes 'em like that?

NEILL—[*Shaking his head.*] No sir-ee. Cain't make heads or tails of it when you git to talking deep.

GILCHRIST—You don't know what it was in old man Jacob Alford made him start a little tale on me, do you?

NEILL—What tale?

GILCHRIST—Tell him, Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—What in the world is he talking about?

NEILL—Search me, Mis' Etta.

GILCHRIST—Now old Jacob is a good soul. He prays in the church, he shouts at revivals and a few times has dropped into trances praying over sinners. And he's a good man and still he tells a little lie about me and Sandy's colored gal.

MAG—[*Coming to the kitchen door.*] Course none of us didn't believe it, Mr. Hardy!

NEILL—[*Snorting.*] Hunh, that tale! Nobody believed it.

GILCHRIST—Somebody believed it a little bit, didn't they, Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Hurriedly.*] Let's quit talking about that! Old Jacob Alford's weak-minded.

GILCHRIST—You see, Neill, people like such stuff; it's excitement, something to interest 'em. Deep down they ain't Christian, Jew or Gentile, black or white, but just people. [*Spitting on the ground.*] And people are quare, Neill, quare. They want something to talk about, something to interest 'em, I say.

MAG—[*Going back to her dishes.*] You hear that, Lonie?

LONIE *nods her head.*

NEILL—I reckon you're right, Mr. Hardy.

GILCHRIST—[*Picking up a stick and beginning to mark on the ground.*] That's how I've figgered it out. . . . Ah, funny!

NEILL—[*After a long silence.*] I saw something that interested me once.

GILCHRIST—[*Teasing.*] You know you didn't, Neill.

NEILL—I did too. [MAG *comes to the door and listens.* LONIE *washes away automaton-like at the dishes inside.*] That time I carried a load of tobacco up to Durham for the old man. Talking about Rhody and her coming from Durham made me think of it. Adder I sold my tobacco that day it was late at night and I was coming out late from town. Just as I got clost to the Malbourne Hotel I never heard sich a

racket of music and horns a-blowing and drums a-going it inside. It was music to beat the band. Never heard nothing fine as that before. Tell you what, it made the natchel hair quile up on the back of my neck. What'd I do but drive off in a side street and hitch my mules and go back there and ast a man all dressed up in a uniform at the door if I could git inside. He didn't say nary a word, jest motioned me in. I went inside a big waiting room and stood, Lord, I don't know how long, looking through a glass door at the going-ons in another big room, bigger'n the whole end of this house here. And there was men and women cutting up in there, kicking their heels, sashaying and promenading up and down same as they was wild. And dresses! A plumb millionaire's fortune was walking on that floor. The men was all diked out in white shirts as stiff as a' arning board down to their belly-band and shoes you could see yourself in. And their claw-hammer coats hung 'way, 'way down behind.

GILCHRIST—And the women, how were they dressed, Neill?

NEILL—[*Waving his hand.*] I'm jest gitting to them. The women—some of 'em had gray hair, but they looked young like girls—they was dressed like a wedding, and they didn't have much on above their waists but little strips over their shoulders and enough to hide things. Behind they was as bare as the p'am of my hand—down, well, low down.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Neill!

NEILL—I'm telling what happened, Mis' Etta. It ain't my fault how they dressed. Some of 'em had on little gold shoes Mag there couldn't git her big toe in, and silver shoes and satin and I don't know what all. And most every one of 'em had a bunch of flowers at their waist big as a slop-bucket. Their cheeks was red and their teeth white as snow, and they was plumb purty as angels.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Shrilly.*] They were painted hussies, every one of 'em!

NEILL—[*Staring at her.*] I'm sorry Mis' Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Twisting her shawl around her.*] The sin in such places!

GILCHRIST—Pleasure ain't sin to everybody, Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST *is silent. Presently* NEILL *goes on.*

NEILL—Well, I reckon I'd a-been there yit if the thing hadn't busted up. And I couldn't git that music out'n my head for a month or two. Fact is, it ain't out even to this day. [*He hums reminiscently.*] Ta-ta, ta-ta.

MAG—[*From the door.*] Wonder if Miss Rhody'll be like one of them painted women.

She bursts into a loud laugh.

MRS. GILCHRIST—That she won't. Sister Minnie

knew how to raise her child. I'll give her credit for that.

GILCHRIST—Didn't look much like it when Rhody was down here years ago—and mischievous!—my—into everything. And as thin as a rail. She'll be too weak to help much in the house.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly crying out.*] She'll at least be company in this lonesome place, company.

NEILL *lowers his head and* GILCHRIST *is silent.*

GILCHRIST—[*Presently.*] I hope she will, Etta. Yeh, I hope she'll be able to play the organ in there and help you sing your hymns.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Shyly.*] That'd be fine.

NEILL—I reckon she's about grown now, ain't she?

MRS. GILCHRIST—She was twelve or thirteen when she was down here visiting and that's been ten years ago.

GILCHRIST—Has? Goodness, don't seem more'n four or five at the most.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Time seems longer to some folks, Hardy, than it does to you.

GILCHRIST—[*Looking at her kindly.*] Yeh, yeh, I reckon it does, Etta. [*Turning towards the kitchen and calling.*] Mag, bring that lamp out'n the dining room, if you don't mind, getting a little dark out here. [*He goes to the tree in the front of the yard and gets*

a tub and takes it to the well. He then draws a bucket of water, pours it in and takes it back to the porch. MAG *brings the lamp out and sets it on the water-shelf. By this time dusk has come on and the fields have become filled with a blue nebulous shade.* GILCHRIST *sets his tub down and begins taking off his shoes.* MAG *and* LONIE *come from the kitchen wearing their slat bonnets, and sit farther up the porch dipping their snuff. They are barefooted.* GILCHRIST *pours dirt out of his shoes and stares at the sky.*] See that, Neill?

NEILL—[*Jerking his head again from the post.*] I didn't see nothing.

GILCHRIST—A little wink of lightning right below the North Star.

NEILL—Where?

GILCHRIST—To the north. [*Pointing.*] Look, there it goes again. That means rain, Neill, rain in forty-eight hours. That'll hit us just right—cotton and corn!—According to the old saying.

MAG—[*To* LONIE.] Look, Lonie, there goes the lightning again. Rainy weather coming on and you can rest.

GILCHRIST—[*Taking off his other shoe and pouring out the dirt.*] The moon quarters day after tomorrow. [*Suddenly in the trees behind the house the katydids burst into a floody chattering.*] And there goes them June bugs singing their heads off in them

maples. Hot nights and June bugs and rain, what more can crops want? [*Pointing up into the sky at an angle of about forty degrees.*] See there, Neill, how the Great Dipper is tipped up on its edge? [*With a childlike smugness in his voice.*] It'll be pouring out water soon. You'n me better clean out that bottom corn on the creek to-morrow.

NEILL—Thought you laughed at me yistiddy for talking o' signs.

GILCHRIST—I don't especially believe 'em [*Laughing.*] —but then they used to work for my daddy.

NEILL—Is that Dipper the one old man Jacob says fell out of the north the year of the earthquake? [*Softly.*] Oh, ho, I believe in 'em myself.

GILCHRIST—The same, except it didn't fall.

LONIE—[*In a sudden sharp husky little voice.*] Reckon Ol' Moster lives out there 'mongst them stars?

MRS. GILCHRIST—God's power is everywhere, Lonie, in you and me and in them fields out there—everywhere. [GILCHRIST *pulls off his socks, rolls up his trouser legs and begins washing his feet in the tub.*] He made everything that creepeth, everything that flies, everything to glorify his holy name. Yea, he's there among the stars and beyond.

GILCHRIST—Did he make old Jacob's Sion, Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—You and Lonie mustn't forget to say your prayers, Mag. Do you?

MAG—I dunno hardly—mebbe so. I dunno. Ask Lonie.

LONIE—[*With a dry cough.*] Did he make the pore and the rich, Mis' Etta, some to live easy, some to live hard?

MRS. GILCHRIST—He made all things, Lonie.

LONIE—[*Her voice dying in a wheezy sigh.*] I reckon he did. Sump'n' made it.

She bows her head under her bonnet and says no more. GILCHRIST *finishes rinsing his feet and props them up on the side of the tub to dry.*

GILCHRIST—Neill, when you go down the road, I wish you'd give the mules some more water. A hot night like this they need it.

NEILL—All right, sir.

MAG—[*Standing up.*] Time for you'n me to be gitting up the road along home, Lonie.

LONIE *gets to her feet and they go across the yard to the left.*

GILCHRIST—See you all to-morrow bright and early. We'll have breakfast on the dot, Mag. [LONIE *suddenly stubs her foot against a plank as she goes across the yard.*] Look out, Lonie, you hurt your foot. [*He rises quickly.*] Here, let me help you.

But she limps on off around the house without a word.

MAG—She ain't hurt, Mr. Hardy. See you all to-morrow if nothing happens.

GILCHRIST—Yea.

NEILL—[*Getting up.*] Believe I'll mosey along too, Mr. Hardy.

GILCHRIST—All right, Neill. Catch a good night's sleep. [*Laughing.*] You'll need it to-morrow. I want you to work my tongue out down on that creek.

NEILL—[*Going around the end of the house.*] Cain't be done. I give up. Good night. Good night, Mis' Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Good night.

GILCHRIST—See you in the morning. [*He sits down on the porch again.*] Poor old Lonie! [*He suddenly strikes the porch floor with his clenched fist.*] God A'mighty, she's suffered and been hurt till the pore soul's petrified. And asking about Old Moster out there in the stars!

MRS. GILCHRIST—Why you want to swear so much, Hardy? Lonie and Mag both have a lot to answer to before their God. They've been bad women in their young days.

GILCHRIST—[*A sudden savagery in his voice.*] Both man and God have wiped their feet upon 'em. Etta, sometimes I think you got too much religion.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Hardy, don't take the Lord's name in vain.

GILCHRIST—Well, I'm right. The old Squire Morgan et up Lonie's looks and strength all the years of his life and then dies without leaving her a brownie. He threw her off like a nigger's shoe in a fence-jamb. Why did God Almighty make such a man, tell me, if he made everything?

MRS. GILCHRIST—His ways are beyond us. Judge not.

GILCHRIST—Yeh, I hadn't ought to talk so, I reckon. Anyhow it's most over now. Lonie won't be good for many more summers' work.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Yes, she'd better get ready to go.

GILCHRIST—[*Sharply.*] God better get ready to receive her.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Crying out.*] Hardy! Don't talk like that, I tell you.

GILCHRIST—[*Brushing the dirt from his feet.*] All right, I'm done. Yeh, maybe you and the preachers are right. I am a blaspheming man—I'm an infidel, I'm lost. But the things in this world are enough to make a man cuss out the Holy Ghost, whatever that is.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Sadly.*] Some day, Hardy, it'll come to you in a great light. You see through a

glass darkly now, then as face to face. [*Bowing her head in her shawl.*] I've prayed and prayed it would.

GILCHRIST—Now, Etta, never mind me.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Drying her eyes.*] Still, let's don't fall out, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—[*Reassuringly.*] Sure we won't. [*Buoyantly.*] We have our ups and downs like other folks, but as long as we pull together we'll get along. Don't get down in the mouth, Etta, everything'll come out somehow.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Yes, everything'll come out for the best. It's promised to us in the Bible.

GILCHRIST—Them promises—— [*He bites his lip and refrains.*] I tell you what, Etta, I was a-thinking as I plowed along to-day that if something happened to me before Mag and Lonie passed out, I'd want 'em provided for so's they wouldn't suffer. As long as I live I'll see to 'em and give 'em work to do.

MRS. GILCHRIST—You'll be here many a day after they've gone to the churchyard.

GILCHRIST—You never can tell. Yes, I'd want you to see to 'em. I'll do for 'em what that cussed old Morgan ought to have done.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Yes, yes.

GILCHRIST—I've worked and saved to accumulate something and—well, there's nobody to leave it to

after we're gone—— [MRS. GILCHRIST *makes no reply, and they sit for a moment in silence. Presently he turns and looks toward the west.*] Look at the evening star there, Etta, shining through them pines, big as a young moon. I've heard it said that the evening star is the same as the morning star. [MRS. GILCHRIST *suddenly breaks into low sobs.*] What's the matter? [*He rises and comes over to her.*] Stop it now. Don't cry.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Oh, I keep thinking and thinking about it. I've ruined your life. I ought never to have married you.

GILCHRIST—Now you feel bad. Go on to bed, to-morrow you'll be all right.

MRS. GILCHRIST—No, no. I'll never be all right any more. [*She catches his hand and holds it.*] I was sitting there at the table and hearing you talk and laugh and play out here and it come all over me of a sudden how old I am and you so young.

GILCHRIST—Why, we're the same age, Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—No, I'm old, old enough for your mother.

There is the noise of a buggy on the road before the house.

GILCHRIST—Now that's all right. [*He pats her shoulder.*] I think that was a buggy stopped out there. Somebody's talking. [*He listens. Presently*

hoof-beats are heard going up the lane.] No, I guess they've gone on, whoever it is. You've got nothing to feel bad about, Etta. Fifteen years you've been a faithful wife. I'd never been able to make what I have without you.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Raising her head.*] What's to be will be anyhow. But I've ruined your life.

GILCHRIST—Stop it, Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—I've been worthless to you. I've been a barren fig tree, fit only for casting in the fire.

GILCHRIST—[*Jerking his hand from her and walking up and down the porch.*] You can't help it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—With the right sort of woman you'd have boys of your own now going with you in the fields——

GILCHRIST—I tell you to hush it! [*He sits suddenly down on the porch, running his hands through his thick hair and patting his foot nervously on the ground. In a moment he goes on quietly.*] And still you go on believing in this God of yours, praying to him, trusting in him, and what does he do for you? [*Bitterly.*] It's all for the best, it'll all come out right! Yes, it will, and when? Where is this God? Show him to me—— [*Stretching out his palm and closing it as if strangling something.*] Him who mashes us in the hollow of his hand like a worm! Is he up there in the sky? Is he down there in the

earth? [*Spitting scornfully.*] No, he ain't. He won't answer me and he won't answer you till the judgment day, and what good will it do then?

MRS. GILCHRIST—Hardy, Hardy, that's blasphemy to talk like that.

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up.*] Sometimes I think on it till I'll go crazy. Yea, your God, he boasts and brags in his great Book about making the sun and the moon and the stars and the light of the firmament above. And he made man, he says, in his own image and set him a king among all things. Then tell me why he persecutes people so? Look at Lonie—ground down to the bottom like the dirt I plow in. And you ain't seen them four idiot women over at the porehouse, have you? Where is he? Let him show hisself, and I'd match muscle with him like Jacob of old. [*Throwing out his hands helplessly.*] But he won't answer. He won't come in the night. He won't come in the day, for this God of yours don't exist. He ain't nowhere. I'm right and you and the preachers are wrong.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Vehemently.*] I know that my Redeemer liveth and I'll trust him though he slay me. There's the word for it.

GILCHRIST—Go ahead and trust him then, for he'll slay you all right. Pore Aunt Marg'ret has trusted in him all the days of her life and she's never known nothing but suffering. If she'd gone to

work trusting in her own might. . . . Ah, it would have been different.

MRS. GILCHRIST—I've got to believe in him. I couldn't live without it, and Aunt Margaret couldn't live without it.

GILCHRIST—Well, let's stop. Talking won't change it either way.

They are both silent. Suddenly out of the darkness at the left a young girl appears carrying a cheap suitcase. She speaks in a soft voice.

GIRL—Good evening, you all.

GILCHRIST—[*Looking up in astonishment.*] Good evening, ma'am.

The girl comes forward into the light. She is about twenty-three or -four years old, strong and well-made. Under a wide hat her brown hair clusters around her pale tired face and soft eyes. About her is a queer combination of innocence and wisdom. Her drooping weariness only partly conceals a sort of richness in her—a richness of living around her lips and in her eyes and full-breasted figure. Her movements and speech betray a kind of matronliness engrafted in her, giving along with her girlishness an air of decisiveness and strength as of one who had known the hard responsibility of bread and meat for others. She sets her suitcase heavily down.

GIRL—You all don't know me, do you?

GILCHRIST *rises to his feet and in embarrassment rolls down his trousers.* NEILL *comes in with a small trunk under his arm.*

GILCHRIST—I can't say we do.

MRS. GILCHRIST—It ain't Rhody, is it?

GIRL—[*Laughing.*] That's who it is, Aunt Etta. [*She hurries over to* MRS. GILCHRIST *and kisses her.*] How are you all? [*Turning to* GILCHRIST.] You didn't know me, did you, Uncle Hardy—I haven't seen you in so long.

GILCHRIST—[*Fumbling with his shoes as he puts them on.*] You don't mean you're the little girl who was down here visiting once?

RHODA—[*Shaking hands with him.*] I've grown up you see. Anybody will grow up in ten years.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Well, I do declare. I'm glad to see you, Rhoda.

GILCHRIST *hurries into the dining-room and fetches a chair.*

GILCHRIST—Sit down, I bet you're tired out.

NEILL *sets the trunk on the porch, takes off his hat and remains respectfully standing.*

RHODA—No, I'll sit right here on the edge of the porch the way I did a long, long time ago when you would sit over there making hawk-callers for me.

GILCHRIST—Did I? I be dog!

She pulls out her hat-pin and takes off her hat.

MRS. GILCHRIST—You sure have changed, Rhoda. I wouldn't a-known you anywhere.

GILCHRIST—How'd you get here?

RHODA—I came over from the station with Mr. Matthews. He brought my trunk by—if you can call it a trunk—and everything. We met Neill—your name is Neill, isn't it?—as we came by the barn.

NEILL—Yes, ma'am, that's my name. Yeh, I met 'em out there in the lane. Where you want me to put the trunk, Mis' Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—Put it in the upper room, Neill. [NEILL *takes the trunk and goes along the porch and into the house at the right.* MRS. GILCHRIST *gets to her feet and follows him.*] You just sit still, Rhoda, and I'll go in and see that the room is all straight. We've had it fixed for you several days.

RHODA—Oh, Hardy, I can hardly realize I'm going to live here with you and Aunt Etta the rest of my life.

GILCHRIST—[*Mumbling.*] Won't take you long to get tired of this place.

RHODA—Tired? I'll never get tired. For ten long years I've wanted to come back. And now I'm here—— [*She stands listening.*] What's that?

GILCHRIST—What?

RHODA—That singing in the trees?

GILCHRIST—That's June bugs, we call 'em. The right name is katydids.

RHODA—They sound happy enough. And look up there in the sky at the stars shining. I never saw 'em much in Durham. I could lie right down here and sleep forever.

GILCHRIST—[*Mumbling again.*] Yeh, yeh.

RHODA—There was always a crowd going and coming up there, such a stir nobody could rest. And out here there's room, plenty of room and so quiet you can hear yourself think. And everything smells so sweet too. [*She gets up and goes over to the left and stands straining her eyes in the darkness.*] Is that cotton growing out there?

GILCHRIST—The best in the neighborhood.

RHODA—I know you'd raise the best. I know you would. To-morrow I'll get me a hoe and chop along with the others.

NEILL *and* MRS. GILCHRIST *come down the porch.*

GILCHRIST—You'd blister your hands the first thing.

RHODA—[*Without looking around.*] I want to blister them. My granddaddy and grandmother on both sides were farmers and I've inherited it. I've

always felt it so. Mother had no business in a town. [*She looks up at the sky with shining eyes.*] This is my home.

MRS. GILCHRIST—I reckon you'll want some supper.

RHODA—I've already had my supper, thank you, Aunt Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Maybe you'll want to go straight to bed, Rhoda. . . . Your room is ready.

RHODA—[*Pointing to the tree in the yard.*] Yes. . . . What kind of tree is that?

GILCHRIST—That's a common china tree.

NEILL—They're common everywhere.

RHODA—Sure. It was nothing but a sprout when I was here a long time ago. [*Turning.*] All right, Aunt Etta. I am purty tired. [*She goes up the porch.*] Good night, you all. See you in the morning. I'm sorry I got here so late.

GILCHRIST—Good night.

NEILL—Good night, Miss Rhody.

RHODA—[*Turning back.*] And won't I just eat you out of house and home though! Eggs and potatoes and sausage and ham and collards and cracklings and all the garden "sass" you could haul in a cart, and buttermilk by the gallon! [*With a sudden look at*

MRS. GILCHRIST.] But, Aunt Etta, I'm so glad to be here!

She and MRS. GILCHRIST *go up into the house at the right.* NEILL *leans against a post looking up the porch and slapping his leg idly with his hat.*

NEILL—Well, sir—I declare!

GILCHRIST—What'd you say, Neill?

NEILL—Nothing, nothing.

GILCHRIST *picks up his cheroot from the floor and lights it. He rises and walks in the yard.*

GILCHRIST—That lightning's quit in the north, Neill.

NEILL—Yeh.

GILCHRIST—[*Walking back and forth.*] Quit!

NEILL—No rain after all mebbe.

GILCHRIST—Dry weather, and it'll rain when it will rain. No, I don't believe in signs, Neill.

NEILL—Well, I believe I'll mosey on down the road.

GILCHRIST—Water the mules, Neill?

NEILL—[*Chagrined.*] I be blamed, I forgot it!

GILCHRIST—I thought so.

NEILL—Sir?

GILCHRIST—Nothing. . . .

NEILL—Then ag'in I didn't have time. Good night. [*He goes off and immediately comes back.*] Reckon she can play the organ, Mr. Hardy?

GILCHRIST—Don't know. [NEILL *starts off again.*] Neill!

NEILL—Sir?

GILCHRIST—[*Lightly.*] She ain't painted.

NEILL—That's right, she ain't.

He goes off chuckling. GILCHRIST *sits again on the porch, leaning his head between his hands and smoking.*

ACT II

SCENE I

SEVERAL *months later, the same setting as before. It is a cold December day near noon, and a big fire is roaring around the pots in the middle of the yard. A pile of firewood is near by. Off to the left rear stretch the fields of brown cotton stalks, dull and dead in the sickly light of the winter sun. The empty burrs rattle in the freezing wind, and the smoke rising out of the kitchen chimney is swept away in its breath. The china tree to the left front is bare.* HARDY GILCHRIST *is killing hogs, and off to the left by the outhouse the sound of voices, shouts, singing and grunting is heard.* MAG'S *voice is raised in a song:*

Ta-ra-ra-ra-boom-da-ree—
I got bumps all over me.

SION ALFORD, *old man* JACOB'S *boy of sixteen, thin and snaggle-toothed, is squatted near the fire broiling hog milts on the coals. He makes some pretensions to being dressed up, with a dirty collar and tie. And now and then he carefully takes off his cap, pulls out a small pocket mirror and arranges his hair which is shining with grease and parted in the middle, with two little rolls of twisted curls on either side.*

A battered auto-harp is lying on the bench close by. Presently he takes up a milt, squints, blows on it, and carefully lays it back to cook. Then after diligently cleaning his fingers with his dirty handkerchief, he sits on the bench and begins twanging the harp.

SION—[*Watching the kitchen door and singing in a high contralto voice.*]

I wisht I was a snowbird
With nothing else to do,
I'd set in the top of the apple-tree
And make sweet music fer you—
Good-by, my lover, oh, tell me good-by.

Old LONIE *comes in at the left with a bucket. She wears heavy brogan shoes, an old slat bonnet, and a man's ragged coat. She dips the bucket into one of the pots and returns the way she came.*

MAG—[*Calling.*] Hurry up, Lonie, and help ketch me these hyuh chit'lings!

GILCHRIST—[*Shouting outside.*] Now everybody pull together! Pull there, Neill, don't let the hair set on that hog! That's it, scrape him, boys! Get it off him while he's hot.

OLD JACOB—[*Grunting and laboring.*] Don't be afraid of him, folkses. He's dead and cain't bite you. Shuck him. I tell you, shuck that hog!

GILCHRIST—[*Presently shouting again.*] Spit on your hands and turn him! [*In a moment* GIL-

CHRIST *with his sleeves rolled up rushes in carrying a bucket. He dips it in the pot.*] Look out, everybody, here I come! This boiling stuff'll bring that hair. [*He rushes out. Presently he shouts again.*] Mag, bring us a pan of hot water to work on this head!

SION *takes out a bottle of perfume and anoints himself and goes on singing.*

SION—

If all the trees was silver
And the blooms was diamonts too,
I'd take me my ax and cut 'em all down
And bring the sweet blossoms to you—
Good-by, my lover, oh, tell me good-by.

MAG—[*Sniffing the air as she comes in.*] The Lord help my life, such a scent!

SION—Hanh?

MAG—You stink worse'n a goat.

SION—[*Sullenly.*] It smells sweet. She uses it.

MAG—She don't wallow in it. Reckon she puts lard on her hair too, don't she?

SION—Hern's purty and'll lay without it.

MAG—He's plumb crazy with love. . . . Setting hyuh all roached up, greased and perfumed and singing like the cherrybims in heaven. You'd better be out there helping your pore old daddy scrape them hogs.

SION—I ain't able to work.

MAG—I'd like to git me a stick and blister your hide, you'd work.

SION—Mammy and Pappy says I'm weakly, I tell you.

He seizes a milt and begins eating it.

MAG—Your belly ain't weakly. I can tell you that. [*Going out with her steaming pan.*] If you was my young'un I'd break me a hick'ry and beat some o' that love and mess out'n you.

SION *stares after her, puckering his forehead thoughtfully. He giggles gleefully and gobbles down the milt. The kitchen door opens and* RHODA *comes to the well with a pail. She is neatly dressed and wears a bright red sweater. Her eyes sparkle and her cheeks are glowing in the cold.*

SION—[*Cleaning his fingers and jumping up.*] Lemme git your water fer you, Miss Rhody.

RHODA—Help yourself.

He draws the water for her as she stands looking out at the workers, and takes it to the kitchen. At the porch he relinquishes the bucket and stares open-mouthed at the door that closes behind her. OLD JACOB, *a little bent man of sixty-five with a gray ragged mustache, comes in and drags up the wash-bench before the fire. His old coat is pinned across his breast with wooden pegs. He sits down, blows*

upon his fingers and stretches his heavy shoes to the fire, laying a whet-stone and butcher-knife beside him.

JACOB—[*In a piping voice.*] Sion, your milt hyuh is a-burning up. [*With a bound* SION *is back to the pot. He grabs his broil from the coals and begins eating it.*] Gimme a leetle piece of it, Sion.

SION—Nunh-unh. They's plenty of 'em out there in the tub, Pa.

JACOB—[*Musing.*] Sech a hog killing, sech a hog killing. He's got enough meat to stock the county. Anh, that's the way it is, Sion, them that has gits more and them that ain't got nothing it's tuk away.

SION—[*Irritably.*] That's it mebbe.

JACOB—[*Looking at him fondly.*] Course you don't understand it, pore fellow. You know you'll be keered fer. The Laord pervides fer babes and sech.

SION—[*Licking his fingers.*] Hee-hee.

MAG *comes in and bends over the fire warming her hands.*

MAG—It's a cold day and his meat'll shore keep. [*Shivering.*] That wind jest cuts through you.

JACOB—[*Punching the fire.*] It do. [*Cocking his eye towards the northeast.*] Bad weather a-coming. Wild geese was flying south last night. [*Holding up his hand.*] The feel in the air 'minds me of the

winter of 'ninety-four. Laord, Laord, that was a cold 'un. The Cape Fair froze over so you could drive acrost it with a mule and wagon. Mis' Kivette did, and her baby with her. [SION *goes out and gets another milt and begins broiling it.* OLD JACOB *looks at him and chuckles.*] Jest look at that there boy. He ain't never had a bait of them things in his life, and don't he smell good?

MAG—If I was Mr. Hardy I wouldn't let him eat up my fresh meat that-a-way, and he not earning his salt.

SION—He don't keer.

JACOB—That he don't, Mag. Hardy's sorry for the pore boy and him afflicted. Sion's pleasures is few in this vale below.

MAG—Hunh!

JACOB—[*Changing the subject.*] Don't seem lak a r'al hawg-killing and Aunt Marg'ret not hyuh.

MAG—She's a-nussing that dying boy o' hern.

JACOB—I reckon.

GILCHRIST—[*Off at the left.*] Step back, Neill, and let me hang him!

JACOB—Jest look a-there at Hardy lifting that hawg up by hisself. He'll weight three hundred if a pound.

GILCHRIST—[*Outside.*] Hanh, there you are. All

right, Neill, bring me fresh water and the tub and I'll gut him in a pair o' minutes.

NEILL *comes in and gets a bucket of water from the pot.*

NEILL—Jacob, you better fill up this here pot.

He goes out as old JACOB *creaks to his feet and begins drawing water at the well.*

MAG—Sion, git some wood and put on the fire.

SION—This hyuh melt is jest a-cooking fine.

MAG—[*Cutting the wood herself and replenishing the fire.*] You make me mad enough to kill.

LONIE *comes in and sits on the bench. Old* JACOB *empties his bucket into the pot and sits down by her. He begins whetting his knife.* MRS. GILCHRIST, *wrapped in a heavy cloak, walks unsteadily down the porch from the right and stands leaning against a post looking out.*

MRS. GILCHRIST—How you all getting on, Jacob?

JACOB—Got 'em all killed and hanging up now, Mis' Etta, and a mighty fine chanct of meat you got out there too.

MRS. GILCHRIST—How much you reckon it'll make, Jacob?

JACOB—Three thousand pounds, no less. I'd stake them two hasiets Hardy give me on it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Two?

JACOB—[*With a touch of gleeful malice.*] Two and a backbone. Me'n my raft o' young'uns 'll feed Sunday.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Yes.

Her eyes roam wearily over the fields and sky. She turns and goes slowly up the porch into the house again. Presently there is the weak labored sound of an organ inside, and a thin shrill voice singing "There is a fountain filled with blood."

JACOB—Pore thing. . . . Ah, clost and stingy right up to the grave.

MAG—Hanh! . . . Getting most too weak to play her organ now.

LONIE *gives a little nodding jerk with her head.*

JACOB—'Twon't be long and she'll be to that bo'rne from whence no traveler returns, as the scripture says.

LONIE—[*With a gasp.*] Sump'n's killing her.

JACOB—Aye, it is. She's wasting fast. [*Sighing.*] We've all got to come to it.

MAG—She's a good woman too—better'n most people know.

JACOB—She is that. She don't talk much, but she's good. I ain't never hearn her say a harm word 'bout nobody. Anh, she's good . . . [*With afterthought.*] and a lonesome woman too.

MAG—[*Laughing and jerking her thumb towards the kitchen.*] That 'un she's got in the house with her ain't lonesome. She talks, she's lively.

JACOB—[*With an admiring chuckle.*] Ain't that young critter a wheel-hoss though? Laord, Laord. She's same as Neill and Hardy for work.

MAG—I didn't think it when she come here from Durham. But she were made fer the farm if anybody were.

JACOB—[*His eyes narrowing introspectively as he appears to forget the subject.*] Where does the scriptures say the spirits of hogs go when they die, Mag?

MAG—[*Popping her lips.*] They don't go nowhere. They're just dead, that's all.

JACOB—In the ground, that's where. It says the animal spirits return in the earth and the heavenly spirits go upward. Hah, hah.

MAG—Hogs ain't got no souls.

JACOB—That's what the scriptures says.

They are silent. Presently RHODA *comes to the kitchen door.* JACOB *watches her meaningly as he whistles to himself.*

RHODA—Sion, bring me some more water, please!

SION *springs up and hurries to do her bidding.*

JACOB—Jest look at that boy. He'll work fer her, plumb crazy about her.

MAG—[*Nodding as she spits.*] They's others crazy about her if I'm any judge.

JACOB—[*Looking at her slyly.*] Heh—heh—heh, ain't they though? [*Jerking his knife behind him and lowering his voice.*] How's Neill gitting on with her?

MAG—Worships the ground she walks on. He goes around like a man asleep.

JACOB—[*Quickly.*] Sho', sho'. . . . And her?

MAG—Cain't make out whe'r she takes to him or not.

JACOB *chuckles wisely again.*

JACOB—[*Looking back over the top of the house at the sun.*] Well, I reckon it's 'bout dinner time fer us.

MAG—Yeh. Me'n Lonie's going to leave the rest of the chit'lings to rid till after dinner.

JACOB—Heigh, Miss Rhody, ain't it time to stop and feed!

SION—[*Coming out of the kitchen.*] She told me to.

He rings the bell and returns to his broil.

GILCHRIST—[*Outside.*] Yeh, we're just coming. [*Presently he and* NEILL *enter at the left. They come to the fire and warm themselves. Their hands are greasy and stained with blood.* GILCHRIST

turns and stands surveying the scene of his handiwork.] How's that for pork, Jacob?

JACOB—A sight fer sore eyes sartain.

GILCHRIST—Every one of them hogs hanging up there is less'n two years old. Purty good for piney-woods rooters, anh?

JACOB—You got the neighborhood beat in everything, Hardy. You're the luckiest man!

GILCHRIST—Ain't luck, Jacob, it's hard work and a little use of my head. Sion, run there to the hog barrel and bring them two pans.

SION—My melt'll burn, Mr.——

GILCHRIST—[*Reaching down with a laugh and lifting him up by the collar.*] Get the pans, Sion. [SION *with a terrified scamper dashes out and brings the pans.*] That's a good boy. You all wash and get ready for dinner. I'll get some soap. [*He goes to the water-shelf and takes a cake of home-made soap from the soap-gourd, calling.*] Is dinner ready, Rhody?

RHODA—[*Opening the kitchen door and looking out.*] It'll be ready in a few minutes, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—Well, bring a little of your blackberry wine out here and warm up Jacob and the rest of 'em a bit, if you don't mind. [MRS. GILCHRIST *suddenly begins playing the organ again and singing.* GILCHRIST *stands listening a moment and then*

turns abruptly back to the group in the yard. He dips water from a pot and begins washing his hands in a basin.] You all excuse me and I'll wash this grease off'n my hands first. I want to step down to the barn and get a bag of salt. [*He pulls out a checkered handkerchief and wipes his hands.* RHODA *comes out with a pitcher of wine and a glass. As* GILCHRIST *goes off around the house, he calls back over his shoulder.*] Help yourself, folks. It'll make you feel young.

JACOB—Yes, and Neill needs it. He's down in the dumps to-day.

NEILL *savagely stirs the fire around the pots.*

RHODA—[*Pouring out the wine.*] Here, Lonie, drink a little. You must be frozen.

LONIE *takes it in her trembling clawlike hands and drinks. Old* JACOB *eyes her closely.*

JACOB—You'll git high if you don't mind out, Lonie, heh-heh.

RHODA—And here's some for you, Mag.

MAG—Thanky, ma'm.

She drinks and hands the glass back.

RHODA—How much, Jacob?

JACOB—Heh-heh-heh, I leave that to you.

She pours him out a large glass. With a preparatory smacking of his lips and a clearing of his throat he

takes the glass and drains it down. He screws up his cheeks till they close his eyes, washing the wine around over his toothless gums.

MAG—You're a-gitting all there is out'n it, Jacob.

JACOB—I am that, heh-heh, I am that, Mag.

RHODA—[*Pouring out another glass.*] Here, Neill.

NEILL—[*Without looking up.*] I don't want none.

RHODA—Come on and drink some.

NEILL—[*Sharply.*] I don't want none, I tell you.

JACOB—What ails you, Neill, got the mulligrubs?

RHODA—Here, drink it, Sion.

JACOB—Hyuh, that boy'll be down drunk if he swallows all that. [*He reaches out and drinks the glass nearly to the bottom and hands it to* SION.] Mebbe that won't hurt you. Don't know though, the smell of a rotten apple makes him drunk.

SION *drinks his swallow and hands the glass back to* RHODA.

SION—[*Shyly.*] That was shore good, Miss Rhoda.

RHODA—Glad it was, Sion. Anybody have any more?

JACOB—No, no, a little snitch later on in the evening when the cold gits blue.

MAG—No'm, I got enough now.

LONIE *shakes her head too and* RHODA *returns into the kitchen.*

JACOB—Wonder Mis' Etta would let 'em have wine around. [*Hastily.*] Not that there's any harm in it, of course.

MAG—Mebbe she cain't help herself.

JACOB—They's gospel fer drinking it though. God the Saviour hisself made wine at a wedding onct. [*Suddenly he pops his hands together and rubs his thighs.*] That stuff shore goes to the right spot. Now a good dinner of collards and backbone and sweet 'taters and I'll be ready to ride. How 'bout you, Neill?

NEILL—What?

JACOB—[*Cackling.*] By gums, he didn't even hear me. Anh, he's studying, wropped up in sump'n'. What is it, Neill?

NEILL—Cain't a man keep his mouth shet if he wants to?

JACOB—Heh-heh-heh, I reckon he kin. More mouths than one's been shet up—some of 'em forever—by a bright piece o' calico.

NEILL—[*Turning his burning eyes upon him.*] What'd you say?

JACOB—[*Starting back.*] Oh, nothing, Neill, nothing. [*Suddenly reaching down and grabbing a pan.*] Le's wash, everybody.

He dips water out of a pot and begins washing his hands. MAG *and* LONIE *do likewise;* NEILL *stands staring at the fire. Old* JACOB *throws the water from his pan and gets the towel from the porch. He wipes his hands and passes it on to* MAG. SION, *now that* RHODA *is in the house, sits contentedly on his haunches gnawing his meat.*

RHODA–[*Opening the dining-room door.*] Mag, could you and Lonie come help me set the table and get the things on? We'll have dinner in a jiffy. And you'll be a lot warmer in here out of that wind.

They hang the towel on a limb of the tree and go in, closing the door behind them. Old JACOB *sits down on the bench whetting his butcher knife.*

JACOB–Neill, I didn't mean to make you mad with my talk. You know I will talk, my tongue jest will.

NEILL–[*Turning himself about.*] Oh, that's all right. I ain't feeling well.

JACOB–Ain't? I'll declare that's bad. Where do you hurt, Neill?

NEILL–Jest feel bad.

JACOB–[*Slyly.*] Pneumony?

NEILL–I dunno, I tell you.

JACOB–[*Mournfully.*] Anh, pore fellow. [*Again he pops his hands together and slaps his thighs.*] Laord, that stuff warmed me up. [*He gets up from*

the bench, brandishes his knife in the air and cuts a step or two.] Here I am eighteen ag'in, ready to go to old man Ransom Pate's dance. [*He turns and pokes his face up by* NEILL'S *shoulder.*] Ain't she a purty thing, Neill?

NEILL—Who's purty?

JACOB—[*Cackling and gesturing towards the house.*] Her in there. She's like one o' them big red apples you buy at the store.

NEILL—[*Spitting with a distasteful grimace.*] I've seed better looking many a time.

JACOB—No, you ain't, Neill. They don't make 'em no purtier. And I ain't never seed a smarter one. Wisht I could call back about thirty year, I'd go fer her.

NEILL—[*Breaking into a bitter laugh.*] You!

JACOB—Yeh, me. Oh, yes, I had a way with 'em, Neill, I had a way. [*Stepping before him and looking significantly up in his face.*] Oh, my boy, you don't know your business. The way to do is to walk in and take 'em. Laord, with your strength you don't have to wait. Why, if I was you, when she comes out to this here pot, I'd jest up and say, "Rhody, we'll git married to-morrow," perviding that was the date you'd sot, and to-morrow we'd be married.

NEILL—Hunh, you don't know Rhody. [*Quickly.*] I ain't planning to git married to nobody nohow.

JACOB—Heh-heh-heh, I know you, Neill, I see through you. Anh, she'd make a match fer you, she would. [*Smacking his lips, his eyes shining.*] Anh, blackberries and strawberries, Neill, they ain't nothing to her. . . . Boy, she's ripe and ready to pick. I hate to see her going to waste and you'd better retch and pick her or somebody will.

NEILL—[*Angrily.*] I don't want to hear no more of it.

JACOB—[*Throwing out his arms.*] I'm giving you good advice all right. [*Stretching his hands out towards the fire.*] Don't she keer nothing fer you a-tall, Neill?

NEILL—She likes me all right, but nothing more'n that, I reckon.

JACOB—Mebbe they's somebody else.

NEILL—Ain't nobody else to be.

JACOB—Heh-heh-heh. Yeh, you're mebbe blind. You see the sporrer 'way, 'way yander, and miss the turkey clost by.

NEILL—[*Grasping his arm.*] Have you seed her with anybody else? [*Casting* JACOB *from him.*] Naw, they ain't nobody in the neighborhood she'd think of going with, though plenty of 'em wants to.

JACOB—[*Winking his eye.*] Look clost by, Neill, clost by.

NEILL—[*Staring at him.*] What you mean?

JACOB—[*Rubbing his hands in delight.*] I'm too deep for you, ain't I? They do accuse me o' that at times. [*Casually.*] Well, jest to be talking, say a man marries a woman like Mis' Etta in there—no harm meant to her, pore critter—— Say he's a big strong fellow like Hardy. Well, sech a fellow sleeping in a cold bed every night fer fifteen year is gonna have some thoughts, ain't he?

NEILL—[*Looking at him puzzled.*] Yeh, you're too deep fer me.

JACOB—You ain't never been married. That gal'd warm Hardy's bed proper, wouldn't she? Mebbe she already has, heh, heh! Yeh, them two'd make a fine match to see, wouldn't they? . . . And the pore woman in there can't live much longer.

NEILL—Great God! Air you crazy?

GILCHRIST *comes in at the left with a bag of salt on his shoulder. He throws it in the outhouse at the left. Unseen by them* MRS. GILCHRIST *comes out on the porch and stands leaning against a post at the extreme right.*

JACOB—[*Watching* GILCHRIST *and chuckling.*] Aye, boy, she's a rich 'un, ripe and ready. And I've seed looks going between 'em. And I've seed other things.

MRS. GILCHRIST *draws herself up rigid, listening.* NEILL'S *long arm shoots out and knocks old* JACOB *behind him.*

NEILL—[*In a strained voice.*] You old—you old dirty b'ar hog!

GILCHRIST—What's the matter, Neill?

JACOB—Nothing, nothing, we're playing, fer I'm feeling young ag'in. [*Drawing back in alarm.*] Why, Mis' Etta, I didn't know you was out here.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Faintly.*] I just this second stepped out for a breath.

RHODA—[*Opening the dining-room door.*] Come on to dinner, you all.

MAG *and* LONIE *are seen taking their seats at the table inside.*

GILCHRIST—[*Going towards the house.*] Come on, Jacob. Come on, Neill. Sion, get up and see if you can eat a little more.

JACOB—Coming with my mouth open.

SION *looks in his mirror and follows him, polishing his finger nails as he goes.*

GILCHRIST—[*Stopping at the porch.*] What's the matter, Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—Nothing, nothing. [*Shivering.*] I'm cold.

RHODA—You want me to bring your dinner up to the fire, Aunt Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Creeping weakly up the porch.*] Yes, bring it up there.

She goes off to the sitting-room. GILCHRIST *looks sharply after her a moment and then goes into the dining-room and seats himself at the table. Old* JACOB *and* SION *troop in after him.*

GILCHRIST—[*Looking out through the door.*] Come on in to dinner, Neill.

NEILL—Go ahead and eat, I'll be in in a minute.

RHODA—[*Coming out with a bucket.*] You all go ahead and wait on yourselves. I've got to put some water on to heat.

She comes to the well and begins filling her bucket. GILCHRIST, *inside, reaches behind him, glances out, hesitates, and then closes the dining-room door.*

NEILL—[*Suddenly clenching his hands.*] Great God Almighty! Blind, blind, I been blind as a bat!

RHODA—You better go on in and eat your dinner, Neill.

NEILL—Come here a minute, Rhody.

RHODA—[*Leaving the well and moving uncertainly towards him.*] What is it?

NEILL—[*Snatching her hand.*] Are you going with me to that party to-night?

RHODA—[*Struggling to free herself.*] I told you once I would, Neill.

NEILL—Do you *want* to go with me?

RHODA—If I didn't I wouldn't a-promised. [*Angrily.*] You better turn me loose or I won't go with you anywhere.

MRS. GILCHRIST *begins playing the organ again and singing* "How Firm a Foundation."

NEILL—Oh, Rhody, I cain't eat nor sleep for thinking of you. Cain't you think a little bit of me, cain't you?

RHODA—Behave yourself, Neill. Now let me go on back, somebody might see you.

NEILL—I don't care who sees us. [*Wildly, as he puts his arm around her, holding her to him and pointing to the house.*] It's him in there, ain't it? Swear to God you don't love him in there at that table!

RHODA—I won't swear nothing. Let me go, I tell you.

NEILL—I won't let you loose. I'm gonna find out something.

RHODA—I'll scream so Hardy will come out here. . . . No, no, I won't either. I'm not afraid of you.

NEILL—[*Wild with anger.*] You do and I'll cut his rotton heart out with that there butcher-knife. Tell me, is it him?

RHODA—I won't tell you. I won't.

NEILL *snatches her to him and kisses her. She fights against him and finally breaks into low sobs.*

NEILL—By God, it is him; it is him! And I'll git him!

The dining-room door suddenly opens and GILCHRIST *stands on the porch.*

GILCHRIST—[*Yelling.*] Neill! [*There is a scramble inside as old* JACOB *rushes to the door to look out.* NEILL *releases* RHODA *and she drops down on the wash-bench weeping.* GILCHRIST *turns back towards the dining-room.*] You all go right on eating your dinner and don't none of you open this here door! [*He closes the door and steps out into the yard.*] Neill, what you mean treating Rhody like that?

NEILL—Nothing. I ain't hurt her. Let me alone now, I'm going in to dinner.

He starts by GILCHRIST.

GILCHRIST—[*Grasping him by the shoulder.*] No, you're not till you explain yourself.

NEILL—[*Springing back and seizing old* JACOB'S *butcher-knife from the bench.*] Get out of my way now. The first man lays hands on me I'll kill him.

GILCHRIST—What'n the name of God ails you, boy! Neill, wake up, have you gone crazy?

RHODA—[*Running to* GILCHRIST.] Go back, Hardy, go back in the house. He'll hurt you.

GILCHRIST—[*Looking down at her.*] No, no, he won't.

He pushes her gently behind him.

NEILL—[*Whining with rage.*] I see it all now. Yeh, it's you been standing in between us. [*Stepping forward with the knife in his hand.*] Git out'n my way now.

GILCHRIST *hesitates a moment and then suddenly kicks the knife out of his hand.* NEILL *doubles up, nursing his hand against his stomach.* GILCHRIST *picks up the knife and throws it out into the field.*

GILCHRIST—Now, Neill, go on and eat your dinner and behave yourself. [*Old* JACOB'S *inquisitive face is seen peering through the half-opened door.*

MRS. GILCHRIST *is heard singing within*—GILCHRIST *sees* JACOB'S *face.*] Shut that door, Jacob, and eat your dinner.

JACOB *bangs the door.*

NEILL—[*Half sobbing.*] Oh, I couldn't see it and it all going on under my nose. Look at you there with your arm around her!

GILCHRIST—[*Dropping his arm, his mouth twitching and his fists clenched.*] Neill, you and me've been together too many days on this old farm

to fight like cats and dogs. But if you say another word like that I'll break your neck.

NEILL—[*Springing at him.*] Try it then, you sneaking devil!

GILCHRIST *grapples with him and as they scuffle back and forth over the yard,* RHODA *stands wringing her hands and moaning. The dining-room door is opened cautiously and old* JACOB *comes out followed by* SION, LONIE *and* MAG. *They are gnawing potatoes and meaty bones which they carry in their hands.* SION *looks on a moment and then clings to his father in fear.*

RHODA—Stop it! Please stop it!

GILCHRIST—[*Trying to hold* NEILL'S *hands.*] Behave yourself now, Neill. Le's stop it!

JACOB—Laord a-mercy, what's up?

MRS. GILCHRIST *comes down the porch.*

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Dropping weakly to the edge of the porch and calling in a low voice.*] Hardy, Hardy!

As they struggle, GILCHRIST *casts his eyes over* NEILL'S *shoulder at her.*

NEILL—[*Gasping.*] I'll kill you. I know about you two dirty dogs!

GILCHRIST—[*Snarling.*] Now, Neill, I'll fix you!

NEILL—Yeh, and I'll knock your teeth down your damn throat!

GILCHRIST *with a wrench frees his hand and strikes* NEILL *full in the face. He falls flat in the yard, the blood running from his mouth.*

MRS. GILCHRIST—Let me get away from it all, let me get away!

She totters up the porch again.

GILCHRIST—[*Bending over* NEILL.] Bring me some water, Rhoda, and a towel. [*She snatches the towel hanging in the tree and brings the bucket from the pump.* GILCHRIST *bathes* NEILL'S *face.*] He'll be all right in a minute.

MRS. GILCHRIST *is heard praying in the house.*

MAG—Lord, he ain't dead, is he?

GILCHRIST—[*Sharply.*] No.

JACOB—[*Slobbering with excitement.*] A mule couldn't a-kicked him no harder. Laord, that was a blow!

GILCHRIST—[*Looking up.*] Go on back to your dinner. [*Shouting.*] Every one of you!

He waves them off before him. With backward glances they all finally return to their meal and close the door.

RHODA—He's getting better now.

NEILL—[*Suddenly sitting up and speaking in a low hard voice.*] Let me alone now, I'm all right. [*He sits quietly a moment and then springs to his feet sobbing.*] Damn you both. [*Raising his hands above his head.*] May I bust hell wide open if I don't git even. [*Whirling upon them.*] You God damn dirty hawgs, that's what you are!

RHODA *shrinks back with her fingers to her ears, and* NEILL *rushes off around the house sobbing and cursing, leaving* GILCHRIST *bent on his knees. He leans forward, balancing himself with his hand on the ground.* RHODA *comes up to him and stretches out her hand, touching his hair.*

RHODA—Oh, Hardy, Hardy!

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up and looking at her with a queer smile.*] Such things happen, they just seem to happen all of a sudden sometimes.

RHODA—[*Twisting her hands in her apron.*] What's to come? And poor Aunt Etta saw it all. [*Suddenly clutching his arm.*] I'm afraid he'll hurt you!

GILCHRIST—[*Taking her hands from him.*] Well, let him. I'll never lift my hands against him again. [*With a sharp sigh.*] Anh, I've loved him like my own boy!

RHODA—It's all because of me. I ought never to have come here. I've felt it before.

He suddenly looks at her intently and then turns away.

GILCHRIST—You belong here. Come on, let's go in now. I've got to get back to my work.

RHODA—[*Shuddering.*] What he said!

GILCHRIST—Ah, don't remember it. [*Helplessly.*] Still people will believe whatever he tells.

He shakes his shoulders and opens the door for her.

RHODA—[*Looking up at him as she passes.*] I don't know what to do.

They go in.

SCENE 2

THE *scene is the* GILCHRIST *sitting-room and parlor, the night of the same day. At the center back is a fireplace with a log fire going, and to the right of this is a door which opens into the* GILCHRIST'S *bedroom. At the right is a neatly curtained window, and farther up at the right front an organ at which* MRS. GILCHRIST *sits playing feebly. A lighted lamp is on the table in the center of the room. In the left center a door opens into* RHODA'S *room, and farther back at the left rear is a door which opens to the back porch. By the door is a wooden box piled high with firewood. The room is carpeted with straw matting, and here and there cheap prim chairs are placed about the room. On the walls hang several*

crayon portraits, distorted likenesses of relatives dead and gone. A rocking chair with a quilt draped over it is before the fire. The wind whistles and whines around the eaves of the house and drums like a brood of swallows in the chimney.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Singing and playing slowly.*]

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Her voice dies away and she leans her face over the keys, sobbing softly in her shawl. Steps are heard coming up the porch, and she rises hurriedly and sits in the rocking chair. MAG *comes in through the door at the left rear.*

MAG—Mr. Hardy told me to come in here and warm, Mis' Etta. The fire's gone out in the kitchen.

MRS. GILCHRIST—That's all right. Come in. [MAG *stands to the fire warming herself.*] Where's Mr. Gilchrist?

MAG—He's out in the smoke-house salting down the meat.

MRS. GILCHRIST—When will he be done?

MAG—He and Lonie's jest finishing up trimming the hams now. He'll be hyuh in a minute. [*Punching the fire.*] Lonie don't feel the cold the way I do. My toes is like tags of ice.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Listen to that wind, Mag, how it cries!

MAG—[*Looking at her closely and shivering.*] Like sump'n' lost. Well, it's got cause to moan adder the doings around here this day.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Ugh!

MAG—I've knowed Mr. Hardy all my life and I ain't knowed nothing but good of him before.

MRS. GILCHRIST—We're all poor erring creatures, Mag. We are nothing in our own strength, even Hardy ain't, though, poor man, he thinks he is.

MAG—[*Embarrassed.*] Yeh, yes, ma'm, I know. Lord. . . . [*Hastily.*] Well, I ain't never seed such a come-off in my born days.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Let me forget it, Mag.

MAG—And it's jest about to kill Mr. Hardy. He looks like his best friend had died.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Have you heard where Neill is?

MAG—Jacob come by about dark and said he'd gone and hired to old man Turner.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Bowing her head suddenly in her hands.*] He's young and headstrong, and maybe he'll come back. But it'll be a sad day for him if he goes back to drinking the way he useter.

MAG—Hunh, Neill Sykes'll not come back. I know him and I know th' Sykeses. They never fergit nor forgive, and he cain't fergit that lick he got in the face. It's that gal, Mis' Etta!

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Quietly.*] What do you mean?

MAG—She's run him out'n his senses. He wouldn't a-done what he done to-day fer a million dollars, but now that he's done it he'll harbor it up till it eats his insides out like box-lye.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*In a gentle voice.*] Mebbe they'll make up to-night at the party.

MAG—Quare—her driving over there in the cold by herself.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Hardy told her to go.

MAG—[*Shaking her head.*] I don't understand it all, not me. Mebbe we're all crazy.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Wildly as she suddenly seizes her by the hand.*] Yes, you do understand it, Mag. You know what's up.

MAG—[*Trying to pull away.*] Lord, Mis' Etta, what's the matter?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Beseechingly.*] Ain't you seen something, Mag?

MAG—I ain't seed nothing, whatever you mean, Mis' Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Ain't she loving somebody else in the place of Neill? Ain't you seen looks going between 'em?

MAG—[*Getting free and staring at the ceiling.*] I don't know nothing about all that you're saying, Mis' Etta. [*Backing towards the door at the left rear.*] Miss Rhody'll come to her senses and take Neill adder all, she will. Don't you worry. Neill's the very one cut out fer her. He'll be her husband yit. [*Hurriedly.*] I got to go back now and help 'em finish. [*As she catches hold of the door it opens and* LONIE *comes creeping in and draws up a chair by the fire.* MAG, *somewhat reassured, moves up again.*] You git done, Lonie?

LONIE *nods her head, bends down and takes off her shoes and warms her feet.* MRS. GILCHRIST *looks into the fire and says nothing. Presently* GILCHRIST *comes up the porch and enters. He sits down and stretches out his legs. For several minutes no one says anything.* MAG *turns herself about by the fire.*

GILCHRIST—Well, Mag, you and Lonie done fine to-day. I appreciate it.

MAG—That's all right. We're glad to do it, Mr. Hardy.

GILCHRIST—I didn't mean to keep you so late. [*Pulling out his watch and winding it.*] Going on ten o'clock. Well, you all sleep late to-morrow.

Needn't come till dinner time if you don't want to.

MAG—All right, sir. [*They sit in silence, embarrassed.*] . . . I reckon we better be going, Lonie.

LONIE *begins to put on her shoes.* GILCHRIST *takes out his pocketbook and pulls a bill from it.*

GILCHRIST—Here, Mag, is pay for to-day.

MAG—[*Taking it.*] That's too much, Mr. Hardy.

GILCHRIST—No, it's not. And there's a couple of backbones wrapped up out there on the porch for you to boil of a-Sunday.

MAG—Thanky, thanky. Come on, Lonie. [LONIE *gets up and follows* MAG.] Good night, you all.

GILCHRIST—See you to-morrow some time.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Good night.

GILCHRIST—Oh, Lord! [*He drops his head wearily on his breast.* MRS. GILCHRIST *looks at him searchingly.*] This has been a hard day for you, Etta. How you feeling?

MRS. GILCHRIST—Now, Hardy, it's come upon you at the last.

GILCHRIST—What?

MRS. GILCHRIST—Now you see what can happen to a man who's proud in his own heart.

GILCHRIST—I know I done wrong to hit him.

[*Looking at his hand.*] If I could just get the feeling of his face from my hand. [*Growling.*] Stop, don't bring it up to me no more.

MRS. GILCHRIST—All these years you've stood out and matched your strength against God, and now he's brought you down low to the ground. I been setting here by the fire since supper running it all through my mind. It's God's work.

GILCHRIST—What's God got to do with it?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Breathing heavily.*] He's got everything to do with it. He can keep your heart purified and save you from strange women.

GILCHRIST—[*In amazement.*] Etta!

MRS. GILCHRIST—He can keep you from temptation. He can open your eyes and show you the gin of the adversary set for your unwary feet.

GILCHRIST—Well, you pray for me then.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*With a sob.*] I've prayed and prayed and prayed. And all this time you've hardened your heart, and now you've brought a curse down upon you and your household.

GILCHRIST—Don't talk no more, Etta. You've had enough excitement for one day.

MRS. GILCHRIST—You've got to reach in your heart and tear this sin out by the roots.

GILCHRIST—What sin, Etta?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Panting.*] You know what sin. [*With a sort of chant.*] And if thine eye offend thee pluck it out. [*Raising her clasped hands above her.*] This house must be purified.

GILCHRIST—Oh, God.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Weeping.*] Hardy, Hardy, can't you see where you are going? Whoever looketh on a woman—as the Saviour said—[*Crying out.*] Thou shalt not——

GILCHRIST—[*Jumping up and walking across the room.*] Stop, stop! [*He goes through the door at the rear. In a moment he returns with a stone churn in his hands and sets it near the fire.* MRS. GILCHRIST *dries her eyes and sits up cold and straight. With an effort he retains control of himself. He turns to her kindly.*] She told me to set her milk to turn and I was about to forget it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Softly.*] Her milk.

GILCHRIST—[*Angrily.*] That's just a way of speaking, Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Yes, yes, her milk, her broom, her chairs, her everything. I'm a burden to the earth, I'm in the way, but I'll live to save you from yourself. I've prayed to God and he's promised me that.

GILCHRIST—[*Bitterly.*] Promised. If you're going to save me, then wipe out what happened between me and Neill to-day. Wipe out his black and bitter

words about Rhody and send him back here where he belongs.

MRS. GILCHRIST—They can't be wiped out. They were the truth.

GILCHRIST—[*Shouting.*] It's a lie! You know it! She's as pure as an angel!

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Putting out a weak hand.*] Don't talk that way, Hardy. If I die the next minute I know it ain't no lie. You've looked on her, yes, you have . . . [*Hoarsely.*] . . . And it's a horrible sin against me and against God. [*She closes her eyes and leans back in her chair.*] There ain't no difference between the thought and the deed. And for all I know—— [*Her voice dies away.*]

GILCHRIST—[*Dropping down in his chair, thunderstruck.*] Well, by God in heaven!

MRS. GILCHRIST—You love her.

GILCHRIST—I won't say no more to you.

MRS. GILCHRIST—And she loves you. I've known it a long time from the way she sews for you and fixes things and can't never get enough of slaving for you. Oh, God above, this house is accursed! She's tried to hide it, but I've seen it and to-day I've heard more of it from other lips.

GILCHRIST—Who's been talking again—Jacob?

MRS. GILCHRIST—If it was him he knew something of what he said.

GILCHRIST—The poor God-damned old crook! But he can't help it, I reckon.

MRS. GILCHRIST—It's the truth.

GILCHRIST—Etta, listen to me.

MRS. GILCHRIST—There's nothing you can say, Hardy. To-morrow Rhoda gets her things and leaves here.

GILCHRIST—We'll come to that later. Listen to me now.

MRS. GILCHRIST—Speak then.

GILCHRIST—They ain't no use in what we're doing and saying. Let's get at the truth. I'll tell you everything that's passed between Rhody and me. Last summer, it was August and about sunset down there in the bottom, she was helping me pile up the hay and there by her something come over me and I kissed her. You can call it what you want. Since then I ain't looked at her and that's the God's truth. It was wrong to kiss her and I know it, but there's no use denying it. I done it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—What you going to do now?

GILCHRIST—Ah!

MRS. GILCHRIST—After what happened between you and Neill to-day she can't stay here no more. People are going to be talking, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—Let 'em talk. They'll talk more if

she goes away. We'll think of something to do. Stop fretting now, you'll worry yourself into your grave.

MRS. GILCHRIST—And that's what you want me to do. You and her both would be glad to see me carried out through that door feet foremost to the tomb.

GILCHRIST—[*Helplessly.*] Etta.

MRS. GILCHRIST—But you won't see it. I'll live and save you yet. . . . Now you listen to me, Hardy. We're going to settle things to-night. I've told you Rhoda's got to leave.

GILCHRIST—[*Shaking his head.*] You needn't say that.

MRS. GILCHRIST—She's got to leave, I tell you, and that to-morrow.

GILCHRIST—And I tell you she ain't going. She come here for us to take care of and we're going to do it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—If she stays here you're both lost and ruined. I'm the one that had her to come. You didn't want her.

GILCHRIST—They ain't no place for her to go and let's say no more about it.

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Struggling for breath.*] If she stays here I'll go out afflicted as I am and shame you before the world.

GILCHRIST—You and her stay, I'll go. Yeh, I'll go out as a harling somewhere for wages and you can let the land lie out and grow up in sheep-burrs and wire-grass. [*Savagely.*] And turn out the hogs in the fields and let the cows and mules into the barn and devour all I've made like the locusts of Egypt.

MRS. GILCHRIST—It's come to the last stand between us, Hardy. I've never stood against you before, but I will now. If I am sickly and half dead, I won't give in. She's got to leave. If she stays here it'll be over my dead body and the curse of the Almighty I'll put on you and her. [*Light footsteps are heard coming up the porch.* MRS. GILCHRIST *rises out of her seat and clings to the back of her chair.*] That's her now, and I won't stay and look upon her face. To-morrow—— [*Going across the room to the door at the left rear.*] It's your immortal soul, Hardy, and her soul I'm thinking of. I'm going to bed now.

She goes into her room and closes the door. GILCHRIST, *as if awed at her manner, sits staring intently after her. The door at the left rear opens and* RHODA *comes in. She is dressed in a becoming hat, dark coat-suit, and trim shoes. Her eyes are red with weeping.*

RHODA—[*Going to the fire.*] What you looking at?

GILCHRIST—[*Starting.*] Nothing. [*She goes into her room at the left and takes off her hat and gloves. When she returns,* GILCHRIST *stands up and gets*

her a chair.] Warm yourself, I'll go out and put up the horse.

RHODA—I stopped by the barn and put him up.

GILCHRIST—Come back by yourself?

RHODA—I came back like I went—by myself.

GILCHRIST—You hadn't ought to have stopped out there in the cold and took out the horse.

RHODA—[*Sitting down.*] I thought you'd be working at the meat still. Did you get it all fixed?

GILCHRIST—Yes, Mag and Lonie stayed and helped.

RHODA—[*Leaning over and looking at the churn.*] The milk's turned. I believe it'll churn now.

GILCHRIST—You've done enough for one day. Have a good time?

RHODA—[*With a strained little laugh.*] Not much.

GILCHRIST—Was Neill there?

RHODA—Yes.

GILCHRIST—[*After a moment.*] What all did you play?

RHODA—"Fruit-basket" and "Put a bird in my cup" and "Going to Jerusalem," and that's about all.

GILCHRIST—[*A smile hovering around his lips.*]

Wisht I'd a-been there. We used to play another good game called "Weaving the Thimble."

RHODA—I'm glad you wa'n't, myself. If you could have seen Neill.

GILCHRIST—Still I hoped you could get him to come to his senses.

RHODA—Where's Aunt Etta?

GILCHRIST—Gone to bed.

RHODA—[*Bowing her head.*] Oh, Hardy!

GILCHRIST—I know. [*Presently.*] What you been crying about?

RHODA—Neill was there at the party, drunk, and he stood up in the middle of the floor and made a speech about me.

She hides her face in her hands.

GILCHRIST—Not you by yourself, Rhody?

RHODA—No, about you and me together—yes.

GILCHRIST—He's rushing on to ruin. I hate to think of what'll happen when he gets sober. He'll want to kill hisself. I know him.

RHODA—I couldn't stand it, and I run away and come home.

GILCHRIST—What'd he say?

RHODA—He told everything he knew and more,

and he hinted and winked about a whole lot of things. [*Twisting her hands nervously.*] Hardy, Jacob saw us in the hayfield that evening. He was passing along by the hedgerow.

GILCHRIST—[*Throwing out his hands.*] There you are——

RHODA—Neill told all that right before the crowd. Jacob let him on to it this evening when you sent him down the road to see Neill.

GILCHRIST—[*Sitting down.*] Now, it's getting too much, Rhody. Neill got drunk because he's kinder lost faith in you and me, that's it too.

RHODA—I know it, and there ain't a thing we can do to convince him different.

GILCHRIST—To-morrow it'll be all over the neighborhood. [*Raising his voice as if imitating some one.*] There goes Hardy Gilchrist whose word has been his bond, a man among men, one I wanted my boys to pattern after. All the time I trusted him he was rotten as a wormy apple. Him running after a young girl before his wife—— [*Groaning.*] Ah, Rhody, I've lived on my good name. My strength and my good name is all I've had. I've thrown it away.

RHODA—[*Convulsively catching his hand.*] And it's all on account of me. I've done it. [*He gestures.*] Now don't, it's true.

GILCHRIST—It's not your fault. We both have

been weak. Etta says no man can make it alone. He's got to have an everlasting arm around him. Mebbe she's right, I don't know. . . . Reckon she's right?

He pulls his hand from hers.

RHODA—I don't know.

GILCHRIST—Nor I. . . .

RHODA—If we could just call back that one time.

GILCHRIST—You wish it hadn't happened?

RHODA—[*In a low voice.*] I'll always remember it and be glad just the same. But it's you I hate it for.

GILCHRIST—I'll always carry it with me, Rhody —the—the kiss you give me and—and—the words you said. [*Striking his knee with his fist.*] I don't care if all the angels in the sky said it was wrong I'd know it wa'n't.

RHODA—And I'd know it wa'n't.

GILCHRIST—[*Straightening himself up.*] So le's put it behind us, child. Let that day stand there like a pillar in our minds.

RHODA—[*In a hushed voice.*] The fields and the sweet hay and the sunset there—and—oh, it will be with me till I die.

GILCHRIST—[*Leaning towards her.*] Hush! Hush! [*He puts his hand on her shoulder and then suddenly draws it away.*] To-morrow I'll go down

and talk to Neill and tell him everything. Mebbe he'll understand.

RHODA—And to-morrow I'm going away never to come back.

GILCHRIST—No, no, you can't. That won't settle it, Rhody. The only thing you can do is—to marry Neill.

RHODA—I don't love him. I can't marry him.

GILCHRIST—We've got to live among people and we've got to do what we don't want to—sometimes.

RHODA—I'd do anything you said for me to do but that. Marrying wouldn't fix it. Let me go away and folks will forget, and all can be like it was before I come.

She stands up.

GILCHRIST—Where'd you go?

RHODA—[*The tears running down her cheeks.*] I'll go back to town or somewhere and work, and I'll leave all these fields and things behind. [*She stifles her sobs in her handkerchief.*] But I won't be able to get 'em out of my mind to save my soul.

GILCHRIST—A-ah, child, all could have been different for you and me. [*Abruptly.*] I don't see no way but for you to marry him. I'll build you and him any sort of house you want, and you can stay here on the farm where you want to be.

RHODA—If you just knew how I feel and will to the grave, Hardy, you'd see what a sin it is to talk of Neill.

GILCHRIST—[*Brokenly.*] Yes, yes, and I love you. It's you that I was made for. [*Suddenly he takes her in his arms and falls to kissing her. In a moment she pushes his face away and with her head against his breast stands clinging to him.* GILCHRIST *looks out before him.*] I don't care what they do, they shan't take you away from me. Let 'em talk and let 'em laugh and mock me, I'll keep you before the whole world.

RHODA—[*Moaning and pushing him away.*] No, no. I've got to go. Let this be the last, Hardy, forever. [*She looks up at him and, catching his face in her hands, rises on her tiptoes and kisses him.*] That's for good-by now.

GILCHRIST—[*Recklessly.*] Then I'll go too. I'll go where you go and be with you.

RHODA—No, no, let me loose. I'll pack my trunk now.

GILCHRIST—[*Following her to the door of her room, his arm still around her.*] I'll go with you, and we'll leave it all to her in there.

RHODA—[*Opening the door.*] Aunt Etta.

GILCHRIST—We'll leave her to her God and her Bible.

RHODA—[*Shivering.*] After to-night I won't see you any more. Now leave me.

She pushes him from her and moves into her room.

GILCHRIST—Oh, Rhody!

RHODA—[*Suddenly turning back and throwing her arms around his neck.*] I can't go from you. I'll die without you. You're my man, my god—everything to me.

She kisses him in an abandonment of love and grief.

GILCHRIST—[*Hoarsely.*] You're mine to-night, Rhody.

RHODA—[*Holding him by the hand.*] Yes, yes. [*Her face aflame.*] This night is mine; it's all I'll have.

She moves within the door, her eyes closed and her head bent down.

GILCHRIST—[*Softly.*] Rhody——

RHODA—[*Looking about her in the room and whispering.*] The nights and nights I've laid on that bed and thought of you. Oh, Hardy, Hardy.

She leans against him and he bends over her stroking her hair. MRS. GILCHRIST *opens her door and sees them. With a low cry she falls upon her knees.*

MRS. GILCHRIST—God have mercy upon their pore souls.

She sinks moaning to the floor.

GILCHRIST—[*Springing around.*] Etta!

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Raising her head.*] Don't touch me. [*Screaming.*] Keep your hands off of me!

Her head falls back against the floor.

GILCHRIST—[*Hurrying to her and picking her up in his arms.*] Are you hurt? What is it, Etta?

He carries her into the bedroom and is heard laying her on the bed.

RHODA—[*Standing alone in the room.*] Oh, my Lord, what have we done?

MRS. GILCHRIST—[*Moaning within.*] You cursed and defiled—you black of heart, God will—— Vengeance is mine saith the Lord. . . . Ye are cursed with a curse. . . .

GILCHRIST—[*Sharply.*] Come here, Rhody, quick!

RHODA—[*Horror-stricken.*] Aunt Etta.

GILCHRIST—[*In a moment* GILCHRIST *comes back and takes the lamp from the table.*] Come on in, Rhody. [*Huskily.*] Did you hear her? Did you hear her? She went with a curse on her lips, a curse for you and me, Rhody.

He looks heavily around him.

RHODA—[*Bursting into sobs.*] We killed her, you and me!

Terror-stricken, they go into the room and stand by the bedside of the dead woman.

ACT III

SCENE I

THE *scene is the same as Act One, several months later. It is a late afternoon in summer. The china tree is in full leaf and the green cotton-fields stretch away to the left. Morning-glories have been planted along the porch, winding up the columns in leafy thickness, and the well has been replaced by a pump.* MAG *is at the tub washing. The wire running from the outhouse to the porch is hung with freshly washed clothes.*

MAG—[*Singing to herself with mournful introspection.*]

Get up in the morning,
  Trouble bothers my mind,
I go to bed at evening,
  It's trouble all the time.
    Oh, I wisht I'd heeded what my mammy said.
    Oh,—and now I wisht that I was lying dead.

He come by my window,
  All in the sweet springtime,
I rose up to listen
  Nothing to bother my mind.
    Oh, I wisht I'd heeded what my mammy said.
    Oh,—and now I wisht that I was lying dead.

LONIE *comes quietly in from the left rear and stands by the wash-bench.*

MAG—[*Starting.*] Lord, you skeered me, Lonie!

LONIE—I thought I'd come down and maybe help you.

MAG—I'm shore glad you did for I was lonesome as a graveyard here by myself. You can start washing in that tub.

LONIE—[*Holding a garment up from her tub.*] Mis' Etta's dress, pore soul, ain't it?

MAG—Yeh, I found it back in the closet this morning. That dress brings it all back to me. It was a fair day when she put it on. She come out on the porch there and called to me and said look at it. And she had a little bit of lace on the collar or something. But, Lord, I couldn't help seeing her pale face and hollow eyes like a body looking in the tomb.

LONIE—[*Soaping the dress on the board.*] Reckon she sees me washing out her dress from up there?

MAG—No doubt she does while she's a-singing with her harp. It's good they got music up there, for she did like to play and sing here below.

LONIE—Yeh, she did. [*After a moment.*] Seems quare, jest like I mought any minute feel her flesh inside this here dress.

MAG—Pime-blank the way I've felt seeing her shoes

setting about and her specs and snuff-box on the mantelpiece by the clock. And yistiddy I found a ball of her knitting with the needle stuck in it.

LONIE—[*Wheezily.*] Anh, everybody has to give up what they're a-doing some day and stop it.

MAG—That they do. And dying won't keep things from going right on and on. They'll be marrying and giving in marriage still.

LONIE—Yeh, they will.

MAG—If I ain't mistook they's a wedding going on some'er's now.

LONIE—Is it them two?

MAG—They dressed up and drove off this morning about ten o'clock—Miss Rhody all dolled up in finery and looking like a queen and he with his black suit and starched collar and shirt on. [*Shaking her head.*] Well, let 'em, pore things, fer if two souls ever loved one another them two does. But Hardy ain't so happy though at times. Sump'n's weighing down on him.

LONIE—I see she was a-loving him a month adder she come down hyuh from Durham.

MAG—And Mis' Etta seed it too, pore thing. That's what holp put her in her grave, 'twixt you and me.

LONIE—Yeh, yeh.

MAG—Still she hadn't ort to mind now fer she's dead and gone and nothing cain't hurt her there.

LONIE—Hardy needs a wife like Miss Rhody.

MAG—Well, I hope they're gitting married for I don't want to stay here another night. [*Looking intently at* LONIE.] I tell you I don't.

LONIE—I wouldn't sleep in that there house for nothing.

MAG—And I ain't gonna stay in there nary another 'un—listen! Last night, Lonie, some time 'way in the night I woke up and couldn't hardly breathe. They was somebody in the room; I felt it.

LONIE—Nanh, nanh!

MAG—I struck a light, but they warn't nobody there. Then I heard sump'n' in the wall trying to git out. I couldn't sleep another wink. And this morning the new plaster was cracked clean acrost.

LONIE—[*Holding up the dead woman's dress fearfully.*] Lordy!

They wash away in silence. LONIE *wrings out* MRS. GILCHRIST'S *dress and hangs it carefully on the line, the two sleeves stretched widely out and caught to the wire by clothespins. Presently old* JACOB *and his boy* SION *come around the house at the rear and sit down on the pump platform.* JACOB *carries a trowel and level in his hand and* SION *carries a shovel.*

JACOB—[*Taking off his hat and wiping his face with his sleeve.*] How you all come on?

MAG—Well as common. You well?

JACOB—Right well fer sich stirring times and it so hot. [*Gazing at the morning-glories.*] Anh, them flowers shore do grow. Makes everything look purty around hyuh.

SION—Mis' Rhody planted 'em.

JACOB—Aye, reckon she did. I'll declare this place has changed the most. Coming up the road there I got to thinking how fine everything looked. New posts on the front porch and window shutters, an' a new pump huyh too.

MAG—Yeh, he shore has fixed up things the last few months.

JACOB—Heh-heh, he has. [*Winking.*] That whole front yard looks pime-blank like a flower garden.

SION—Mis' Rhody likes flowers. Mis' Etta didn't never keer nothing fer 'em.

JACOB—And them new lightning rods on top of the house shore do shine fine in the sun, heh-heh. Now since Mis' Etta ain't hyuh to pray for him Hardy must be afraid the Upper Powers is going to strak him dead with some o' their fire.

MAG—[*Sharply.*] He mought.

JACOB—[*Winking again and spitting profusely.*] Heh-heh, he mought be fearful of it.

SION—That there's Mis' Etta's dress dripping there on the line.

JACOB—[*Mournfully.*] And I seed her a-wearing it onct.

MAG—Lonie's jest this minute hung it out.

JACOB—What's become of all her things, pore critter?

MAG—They're all washed and arned and laid in her trunk.

JACOB—Looks like the young 'un would wear 'em.

MAG—She wouldn't put one of 'em on fer the wide world.

JACOB—Heh-heh, no, I reckon she wouldn't. Well, they's a lot o' good clothes going to waste, I betcha.

MAG—They's a whole trunk full o' things. Miss Rhody put 'em away one morning, crying like her heart would break.

JACOB—That there's a good gal fer you, Mag, if I do say it myself.

MAG—[*Dipping clothes from the pot and carrying them to the tub on a stick.*] You've said a lot of hard words about her, Jacob.

JACOB—Nanh-nanh, I've jest said what the others said. I ain't never wished her a grain o' harm, not me.

[*Excitedly.*] But you jest wait till I tell you all the news, folkses.

MAG—[*Angrily.*] I've talked about 'em myself some, but not like you. [*Thinking.*] News—still a news-toter—I've hearn you at church laying Hardy out fer being a' infidel, and you used to talk about pore Mis' Etta, too, and both of 'em was as good to you as they could be.

JACOB—But I've done her a good turn to-day, ain't we, Sion? And that'll help her to rest.

SION—We have, I reckon.

JACOB—We jest finished putting up her tombstone at the church.

MAG—You have?

JACOB—Yeh.

SION—It shore is a purty 'un.

JACOB—With two hands a-shaking on it and a verse out under it saying "Asleep in Jesus." So she's fixed and complete now and can rest till the judgment day. When we was done I said a little bit of a prayer over her, didn't I, Sion?

SION—[*Slicking down his hair.*] He stood up and prayed out loud.

JACOB—[*Wiping his eyes.*] And the pure tears come up in my eyes a-thinking on her, pore thing.

MAG—I bet they did and I bet Sion bellowed like a calf.

SION—[*Sullenly.*] Not me. I ain't no calf—I tell you.

MAG—Hardy didn't know the tombstone had come.

JACOB—That he didn't and he off—off—— But I'm a-coming to that, folkses. The man brung it over from the depot this morning. Hardy'd told me he wanted me to put it up when it did come. And I went and got Sandy and his two boys and we sot it.

He suddenly breaks into a long toothless laugh.

MAG—A tombstone's a quare thing to be laughing about.

JACOB—[*Wiping his eyes.*] It ain't that, no sir-ee, it ain't that. I've got a piece of news fer ye. What you reckon that depot man told me while he was unloading Mis' Etta's stone? Heh-heh. He told me he saw Hardy and the gal driving the fine new horse out o' town a-flying towards Dunn. And, folkses, they was married at the courthouse this morning. [*He slaps his leg with his hat.*] And here I set waiting to welcome the bride and groom, and Sion too.

SION—[*Polishing his nails.*] Me too.

JACOB—[*Sadly.*] Bad fer pore Sion to lose his sweetheart that-a-way. But you'll git you another 'un, boy. You and Neill kin go out courting together now.

MAG—Has Neill heard about 'em marrying?

JACOB—I told him.

MAG—[*Scornfully.*] Course you did.

JACOB—And he's coming up to welcome 'em home. Now if you got a leetle o' that good wine in the house fer Neill, we'll all git ready to celebrate.

MAG—You better go down that road and tell Neill Sykes not to come up here. There's been enough trouble 'twixt him and Mr. Hardy. Apt as not he'll come drunk ag'in like he's been half the summer.

JACOB—A-ah, he's lost faith in man and woman too, Mag. Who wouldn't drink in sich a fix?

MAG—If you'd a-kept your long tongue out of it, him and Mr. Hardy would a-been friends ag'in long ago.

JACOB—[*Angrily.*] Why, I've talked to him and Hardy's talked to him and it don't do no good. He's done quit old man Turner and don't do nothin' but lie in his daddy's house and eat and sleep. He's ruint fer good!

MAG—And you helped ruin him, you and him off together drunk every two weeks.

JACOB—Not me, Mag. He tempts me no doubt, and I'd ort not to give in to him.

MAG—Next month the preachers'll be after you at

big meeting and you'll be up testifying and praising God.

JACOB—We all are weak and empty vessels, Mag.

NEILL *comes in around the house, unshaven and haggard. He has been drinking.*

NEILL—[*Shouting.*] Hooray for the bride and groom!

He sits down on the porch before the kitchen door. MAG *and* LONIE *hang out their last garment.*

JACOB—Hooray!

MAG—You'd better stop that hooraying and go back home if you know what's good fer you.

NEILL—The happy couple come yet?

JACOB—Not yit. We'll jest set and wait fer 'em.

LONIE *sits down on the wash-bench.*

MAG—I'm going in, Lonie, and tie up my clothes. I won't be needed hyuh to-night.

JACOB—[*Chuckling.*] That you won't, Mag. Hardy and the gal will be enough—heh-heh.

MAG *goes up the porch and into the house.*

NEILL—[*With a magnanimous wave of his arm.*] Come over hyuh, Jacob! Come over, I got sump'n' purty for you. And you too, Sion!

JACOB—Nanh-nanh, Neill, I'd jest as leave set hyuh.

SION—[*Sullenly.*] I don't want nothing.

NEILL—Come on over, I tell you. [*They move over to him and sit down on the porch.* NEILL *pulls a large flask of whiskey from his pocket.*] How's that for joy and singing at a wedding!

JACOB—[*Looking at* LONIE.] No, no, Neill, I cain't now. I've quit.

NEILL—Quit! When, this morning? Hyuh, if you don't drink you ain't my friend.

He hands it to JACOB.

JACOB—Well, what kin a-body do? We are commanded to be friends one with another. [*Spitting out his tobacco and uncorking the bottle.*] They was spirits at the wedding in Canaan, and here's to everybody. [*He takes a deep drink.*] A-n-h!

NEILL—[*Taking it from him and drinking.*] Here's to him and to her, by God!

He pushes the bottle into SION'S *hands.*

JACOB—Heh-heh—I be danged, Neill. Yeh, hyuh's to 'em.

NEILL—Drink some o' this far and git some color in your cheeks.

SION *raises the bottle and drinks, his face crawling in pain under the burning liquor.*

JACOB—Hyuh, hyuh, that's enough.

He lifts the bottle from him and drinks again. MAG *suddenly bursts out of the house carrying a bundle of clothes in her hand.*

MAG—Lord-a-mercy!

JACOB—What'n the world has happened?

MAG—[*Dropping down on the pump platform.*] I seed a sight that chilled me to the bone.

JACOB—Was it a ghost or what?

MAG—When I come out of her room with my clothes, there sot Mis' Etta playing the orgin.

JACOB—[*Giving a squeak.*] Nanh, nanh, you couldn't.

MAG—And when I looked ag'in she was gone.

LONIE—[*In a low throaty voice.*] She cain't rest in her grave.

JACOB—[*Drinking from the bottle and appealing to* NEILL.] It ain't so, don't you know t'ain't so?

NEILL—[*Springing up and waving his hat.*] Hooray fer the wedding! Now we'll have a grand reception. The old woman's come back from her grave to help welcome 'em to her bed. [*The hoof-beats of a trotting horse are heard down the lane.* NEILL *staggers*

to the left of the house and stands looking off around behind it. He comes back into the yard.] Yonder they come burning the wind. A-ah, but they're in a hurry. [*Brandishing his bottle.*] It's love, love burning 'em up and driving 'em on.

The buggy draws up and stops before the house. SION *suddenly begins to cry.* JACOB *gives him a drunken punch.*

JACOB—Stop it, boy, there comes Miss Rhody. You don't want to let her see you.

SION *snuffles in his sleeve. They listen and* RHODA *is heard entering the house at the front.*

MAG—Come on, Lonie, le's leave hyuh. [LONIE *gets up and follows her across the yard.*] Neill, you and Jacob better go on away from hyuh.

RHODA *comes down the porch at the right wearing a long gray clinging dress and a pale green scarf thrown over her shoulders. She starts back on seeing* NEILL.

NEILL—[*Bowing low.*] Greetings to the bride.

RHODA—Are you going, Mag?

MAG—I've got all my things tied up here and I'm going. You won't need me to-night, will you?

JACOB *bursts into a guffaw.*

RHODA—[*Looking at him sharply.*] All right. Did you get through the wash?

MAG—Yes'm. [*Hurriedly.*] Come on, Lonie, le's git away.

They go quickly off at the left. RHODA *stands looking after them perplexed.*

NEILL—Where's the happy groom?

RHODA—[*Brushing her hand across her face.*] Hardy's putting up the horse, Neill. Is there anything I can do for you and Jacob?

NEILL—Not by a damn sight!

JACOB—[*Winking.*] No'm, Neill and me and Sion jest want to bid you welcome into the holy state of matrimony. Don't we, Sion?

SION—[*Giggling drunkenly through his tears.*] Merry Christmas to you, Miss Rhody.

He leans against a post slobbering and his tongue hanging out.

RHODA—You've been giving him liquor, Neill?

NEILL—[*Waving his bottle.*] We're all drinking to your honor. [*Holding out the flask.*] And won't you join with us to celebrate?

JACOB—Wedding and love—heh-heh.

RHODA—[*Shrinking back against the wall.*] Stop it, please. Oh, Neill, please go away before Hardy comes in.

NEILL—[*Clinging to the porch post.*] What's

wrong with me? Ain't I sober as a judge, sober as that damned Hardy Gilchrist you'll sleep with to-night?

RHODA *covers her face with her hands and moves up the porch.*

JACOB—Course he's sober, we're all sober. And they ain't no harm in tasting a drap to you.

NEILL—And this is my farewell party to everybody. I've joined Uncle Sam's men and to-morrow I'm going to the army. And I got my gatling gun with me.

He pulls out a pistol and brandishes it in the air.

JACOB—Gonna be a soldier, Neill? Hooray—fight fer your country.

He eyes NEILL *foolishly.*

NEILL—[*Putting the pistol back in his pocket.*] I signed up yistiddy in Dunn. In a week I'll be on the border killing Mexicans. [*He suddenly waves his bottle like a saber and marches up and down the yard singing.*]

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching.

[*He makes a drunken salute and then waves his hands unsteadily over the fields.*] What's in this farming and sweating your insides out? Nothing. It's war for me in the service of the flag. I hate them fields out there. I hate everybody. I hate Hardy Gil-

christ and all he's done to me. I hope to God trouble comes on him like hail out'n the sky till it beats him to the earth as low-down as me. [*His voice breaking in drunken sobs.*] He's laid awake at night and hatched his plans and sot his steel-trap to ketch me in. Jacob knows he has. And he's caught me all right. I'm down hyuh lower'n a nigger and he's up there with his woman like God A'mighty on the throne.

RHODA—[*Moaning.*] Oh, Neill, don't, don't. . . .

NEILL—[*Throwing his bottle from him and breaking it to pieces against the side of the outhouse.*] He's plowed me in the fields like a damned old steer, night and day he's drove me on in a yoke with him. I've dug in his bottoms, and rooted up stumps a' engine couldn't budge and dug in his ditches and cut away his briars and hedges for him. And all the time he's sot back and smiled at his eating me up in his hopper. Look at his hogs and mules and corn and his hay piled up higher'n a barn and his money rusting in a bank—I helped make it, these hyuh two arms piled it up for him. [*Spitting.*] A-ah, he takes all and leaves me nothing. [*Singing.*]

> Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching,
> Cheer up, comrades, they will come. . . .

Old JACOB *takes up the song and begins marching with him.* RHODA *runs into the house and shuts the door behind her. Presently* NEILL *stops and puts his hands to his head, swaying from side to side.*

JACOB—[*Belching and looking out at the fields.*] He's done me the same way, Neill, the same way. Hyuh I've lived on his land fer ten long year and what have I got. Durn his black soul. Me'n Nancy ain't got nothing, nothing. Sion there'll be left a pore boy without a cent in the world. A-ah, he's et the fat of the land and fed us the husks and crumbs. God is hard on the pore harlings and tenants.

GILCHRIST *is heard entering the house.*

NEILL—Come on, there's the bridegroom coming in to the bride.

He pulls SION *up and starts across the yard towards the rear.*

JACOB—Leave 'em alone—heh-heh.

NEILL *stops and looks around him. He points to the outhouse door.*

NEILL—Le's git in there. I ain't gonna leave him yit. We'll come out and serenade the devil torectly.

JACOB—We'll watch 'em—heh-heh.

After much clambering and pushing they succeed in getting over the door-sill. Presently GILCHRIST *and* RHODA *come down the porch.*

GILCHRIST—Where is he?

RHODA—Don't say anything to him, Hardy. He's drunk and out of his head almost and he's got a pistol.

GILCHRIST—Never mind that. [*Looking around.*] They all must have gone. [*He steps down in the yard and walks to the end of the house.*] Jacob.

RHODA—They've gone, thank the Lord. [RHODA *comes down into the yard and stands beside* GILCHRIST.] I'd give anything if he was back our friend again. [*Clinging to* GILCHRIST.] Oh, it just makes me feel awful to think of him. . . . If he could just forgive us and be at peace!

GILCHRIST—Aye, I'd like for everybody to be at peace to-day, to-night. [*They stand looking out over the cotton fields towards the red of the sunset. From behind a small cloud that hangs above the pines to the west the light from the hidden sun spreads up across the sky like the spangles of a great exploded rocket.* GILCHRIST *puts his arm around* RHODA.] Yes, I'd like for all the hard words and the bitterness to be wiped out everywhere. It's like ashes in my mouth to think of Neill.

RHODA—Maybe he'll come back from the army with it all forgot.

GILCHRIST—The army!

RHODA—He's going off to-morrow.

GILCHRIST—Anh, worse and worse. The army. I'll miss him and them fields'll miss him. And as for him he can't never forget 'em. Still, maybe it's for the best. Now let's go in, go into our house, your house and mine.

RHODA—Our house.

They step up on the porch and GILCHRIST *turns and looks out at the fields and sky,* RHODA *leaning against him.*

GILCHRIST—Try to forget all the trouble now. I'll take care of you.

RHODA—I ought not to feel afraid. But every now and then I feel like a cold breath of wind comes over me—feel afraid somehow.

GILCHRIST—You just imagine a lot. Rest against me and put it all out of your mind.

RHODA—I'll try. I will, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—Somehow I feel almost like believing in Etta's God to-night, Rhody.

RHODA—I do, I do too.

GILCHRIST—Look at that sky full of glory over there, Rhody, and the trees reaching around the fields like shutting off all the world for you and me.

RHODA—Yes, yes.

GILCHRIST—[*Looking up at the sky.*] If they's any place up there beyond the stars like Etta believed, I know she sees us and is satisfied.

RHODA—She can't hold it against us any longer. I know she can't.

GILCHRIST—No. For now she understands and

knows we've never meant no harm. She sees how hard it's been for you and me, what we've suffered and gone through with all these months.

RHODA—And we'll still have to suffer, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—Ah, that we will. People will go on talking, but we'll live it down. We'll make 'em believe in us. We'll give to the poor and the afflicted and this house shall be like a well of kindness in a weary land.

RHODA—It will, Hardy, we'll make it so.

GILCHRIST—[*Exultantly.*] And in these fields we'll toil and labor and bring forth a hundredfold and more, [*With a wide gesture of his arm.*] toiling and sweating and happy for the joy and the life that's in us, Rhody.

RHODA—[*With a broken sob.*] I could die with you now just about, and not be sorry.

GILCHRIST—[*Holding her tightly to him.*] And we'll raise up sons and daughters, Rhody, many of 'em, as strong and solid as that dirt out there. And we'll go down into the grave, them blessing us. [*He bends his head over her, and then bows down brokenly, clasping his arms around her knees.*] Oh, God, or spirit—if there is one up there or anywhere—look down on us and hear our prayer. Remember not our transgressions, we are the weak and erring ones, maybe thy children—in the image of the Most High. And—oh, Etta, Etta, be at peace and be merciful,

for now we are happy . . . [*His voice dying out.*] happy at last.

He bends his head and kisses the hem of RHODA'S *dress.*

RHODA—[*Leaning over him, her body shaken with sobs.*] Don't . . . don't . . . not that . . . oh, you are great and wonderful and I am nothing. . . .

A little gale of mocking laughter trickles out of the outhouse. In a moment it sounds again.

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up in horror.*] What's that? Who's out there?

In the silence the chickens are heard flapping their wings and making muffled noises on the roost.

RHODA—It was the chickens going to roost.

GILCHRIST—[*Looking about.*] I thought I heard somebody. Maybe it was nothing. [*Bending tenderly over her.*] Le's go in now, honey. [*With his arm around her they go up the porch. Again the laughter breaks across the yard.* GILCHRIST *starts back as if struck.*] Who's that!

As he turns again down the porch, the outhouse door opens and NEILL, *old* JACOB *and* SION *tumble out.* NEILL *has a guano trumpet in his hand and old* JACOB *carries the joint of a stovepipe. They are drunker than ever.*

NEILL—Hooray for the bride and groom!

JACOB—Hooray.

NEILL *blows a blast upon his trumpet, old* JACOB *beats the stovepipe, and* SION *claps his hands.*

NEILL—We've come to serenade you.

They stagger up and down the yard blowing and beating. SION *makes his way over to the bell-post and leans against it slobbering.*

GILCHRIST—[*Shouting above the din.*] Neill, stop that foolishness!

NEILL—[*Lowering his trumpet and leering up at them.*] My best wishes to you. I hope you have a warm bed and great joy.

GILCHRIST *starts out of the porch, but* RHODA *clings to him.*

JACOB—The same here, Hardy, with all my heart.

NEILL—May God A'mighty set a burning mark on you and give you no peace and send you a gang of children with the head of calves. A brood of goats and cows and stinging adders, by God! Yea, I hope they'll be snake-headed, for you're both snakes in the grass!

JACOB—[*Beating on his stovepipe.*] Heh-heh-heh, and die without a roof over they heads.

GILCHRIST—[*Groaning and throwing out his hands.*] So be it. I won't hit you, for I know it's tear-

ing in your liver, Neill, and you're drunk. . . . A-ah, Jacob. Le's go in, Rhody.

He bows his head and he and RHODA *go up the porch and into the house.* NEILL *and his companions fall to their blowing and beating again.*

NEILL—[*Shouting.*] You two dirty whores! [GILCHRIST *rushes out through the door and down the porch, and then stops again, staring at them. Shouting.*] You two dirty whores! Hawgs and whores, God damn you! [*He marches up and down the yard singing.*]

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching . . .

[*He pulls out his pistol and suddenly shoots himself in the breast, falling heavily in the yard.* JACOB *stands looking at him crazily, beating abstractedly upon his stovepipe and* SION *begins tolling the bell.*

JACOB—Heh-heh—what you doing like that fer, Neill?

GILCHRIST—[*Rushing down the porch.*] What—Great God! Rhody, Rhody, Neill's shot hisself! [*He hurries into the yard and bends down beside him. In a moment he turns away and stares at the ground.* JACOB *stands looking on in amazement, his mouth open and slobbering, tapping with his stick as if in a dream.* RHODA *comes slowly down the porch, her face hid in her scarf.* GILCHRIST *looks at her in anguish.*] Rhody, he's gone.

RHODA—[*Sitting suddenly down on the edge of the porch.*] Oh, I can't look at it.

She bows her head in her lap, weeping and moaning.

GILCHRIST—[*Screaming at* JACOB.] Stop that beating. . . . Sion!

SION *stands looking at him terrified. Presently he begins to sob.* JACOB *comprehends what has happened, and with a howl of terror scrambles out at the left rear.* GILCHRIST *raises his head and looks at* ETTA'S *dress hanging on the wire like something crucified.* RHODA *rises and moves blindly towards him.*

SCENE 2

THE *scene is the* GILCHRIST *sitting-room nearly a year later. The room is furnished much as before except that a center table with a vase of flowers takes the place of the organ, a new bureau with a mirror has been placed at the left, and a few sprays of budding branches are placed decoratively in pots in the corners of the room. It is a cold Sunday in Spring, and a log fire is smoldering in the fireplace.* RHODA GILCHRIST, *dressed in a loose wrapper, her hair hanging down in two shining braids, sits leaning over a baby's cradle before the fire. Her face is drawn and pale. After a moment she rises and stares about her uncertainly. Finally she moves over to the door at the right rear, stands as if listening and then turns and takes up the Bible from the table with a touch of*

furtiveness, opens it and sits down reading. Every now and then she leans sorrowfully over the crib. Once or twice her words are audible as she reads.

RHODA—". . . and said . . . Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not. . . ." Ah, me! [*She clutches at her brow and goes on reading.*] "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child . . ." [*Her voice dies into a mumble. Presently* HARDY GILCHRIST *comes quietly in at the rear. He is dressed in his Sunday best, his hair combed back, his dark clothes pressed and neat save for splotches of mud on his shoes. The passing months have deepened certain lines of grimness in his face. As he enters,* RHODA *looks up startled and lets the Bible slide to the floor.*] You've come back soon, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—[*His face softening as he glances at her.*] Yes. . . . [*He looks down at the baby in the crib a moment and sighs.*] Poor little fellow. [*He bends down to listen and then lifts his head and stares in the distance.*] Ah—well. . . . [*Reaching in the crib and taking up a bottle filled with milk.*] Won't he drink any of it yet? [RHODA *shakes her head and looks hungrily at him.* GILCHRIST *sets the bottle up on the mantelpiece and comes over behind her chair and smoothes her forehead gently.*] Don't worry, honey child.

RHODA—[*Clutching his hand.*] He's not had an ounce of food in two days. . . . You didn't go.

GILCHRIST—You do like the doctor said and quit worrying, and in a little bit you'll be so you can nurse him.

RHODA—I wish so.

GILCHRIST—I don't worry; you mustn't.

RHODA—Hardy.

GILCHRIST—Maybe some but not much. Forget it now. Come and rest yourself.

He sits down in a rocking chair and takes her in his arms, soothing her. She closes her eyes and as he looks down at her a haggard restless look comes over his face. He begins abstractedly pushing his hand through his hair.

RHODA—[*Looking up.*] Something—now, look, you're worrying again. [*She watches him intently.*] And you just told me not to.

GILCHRIST—I was thinking——

RHODA—[*Sitting up straight in his lap.*] Sometimes it seems you ought to hate me.

GILCHRIST—[*Smiling at her.*] Don't be foolish, child, rest yourself against me.

RHODA—All the time we were planning about him, strong and healthy, and then he comes so little and weak. It was my fault.

GILCHRIST—[*Soberly.*] It's not that, hush. . . . Oh, then so many things kept worrying you.

RHODA—And I couldn't help it, I love you so.

GILCHRIST—[*Restlessly.*] We both worried too much.

RHODA—[*Catching his face between her hands.*] Reckon we'll ever get things straightened out the way we thought?

GILCHRIST—Sure we will.

RHODA—[*Staring at him searchingly.*] Are you keeping something from me again, Hardy?

GILCHRIST—Why should I?

RHODA—You talk strong that way every time something happens. Has anything else happened?

GILCHRIST—[*Caressing her.*] And every time I go out you think something bad has happened or is going to happen.

RHODA—And I have reason to.

GILCHRIST—Hanh?—Yes, yes, in a way.

RHODA—Why'd you come back from church so soon?

GILCHRIST—I haven't been to church, Rhody.

RHODA—Why . . . you said you'd go.

GILCHRIST—I started, but I didn't go.

RHODA—It was to be a big day for you, Hardy, all

the people there to pray and try to help you, help you and me.

GILCHRIST—Did you want me to go and be prayed over?

RHODA—I don't know. . . . I don't know what I want. [*Timidly.*] Maybe it'd help some. . . . Oh, I don't know.

GILCHRIST—[*Decisively.*] No, I decided not to go. Let them go on and follow after their God and I'll follow mine.

RHODA—[*Leaning against him.*] Somehow I wanted you to go, maybe for the baby's sake, I don't know.

GILCHRIST—What you mean?

RHODA—After what the preacher said yesterday I wanted you to go over there, I think I did.

GILCHRIST—And I'd a-been weak if I had gone.

RHODA—Maybe it don't pay to be too strong.

GILCHRIST—Don't, Rhody. Only with strength can we make it clean right on to the end.

RHODA—I hope we can make it.

GILCHRIST—[*Buoyantly.*] Sure, poor child. Reading the Bible?

RHODA—I'm always lonesome when you're away. I picked it up.

GILCHRIST—Well—yes, I might a-gone to church, but I went by the pasture to see about the big hog.

RHODA—Is he better?

GILCHRIST—I suppose so. [*Grimly.*] He was lying in the pen dead as a door-knob.

RHODA—Oh, Hardy. [*She looks at him a long while. Whispering.*] It keeps being that way.

GILCHRIST—[*With a faint touch of anger.*] I've had cholera to kill my hogs off before. [*He pulls her tight in his arms.*] Lay your head on my shoulder and go to sleep. Everything is quiet and just us here, forget everything. . . .

RHODA—[*Starting up.*] I felt something sharp in your pocket.

She reaches into his pocket and pulls out a butcher-knife.

GILCHRIST—[*Taking it quickly from her.*] And would I go to church? I saw it lying there where I throwed it in the field that day—it all come back to me—and would I go to church? . . .

RHODA—[*Uncertainly.*] Maybe.

GILCHRIST—My mind was so full of things I had no mind for their God, I tell you.

RHODA *gets up from his lap and sits in a chair. Soon* GILCHRIST *rises, lays the knife on the mantel, and*

reseats himself in his chair. Again for a moment his face is filled with a somber brooding.

RHODA—[*Watching the knife.*] I don't like for it to be up there.

GILCHRIST—[*Starting.*] All right.

He gets the knife down and holds it undecidedly in his hand.

RHODA—Burn it up.

He looks at her sharply and then throws the knife into the fire.

GILCHRIST—You can't burn it up, nothing but the handle. The blade is steel. [*Looking at the baby.*] He never cries, poor little man.

RHODA—He's never had the strength.

GILCHRIST—[*Taking off his coat.*] I got to go up and bury that hog.

He goes into the room at the left and reappears with his work-clothes in his hands.

RHODA—I wish you wouldn't go.

GILCHRIST—I'll be back purty soon. Mag'll keep you company.

RHODA—She's gone home a minute to look after Lonie.

GILCHRIST—[*Dropping his clothes again in the room at the left.*] All right.

He stands a moment thinking. Abstractedly he rolls up his sleeve and runs his hand back and forth along his forearm. His face darkens again with shaggy introspection.

RHODA—[*Smiling with mournful teasingness.*] You're just about the strongest man in the world, I bet.

GILCHRIST—[*Quickly.*] And the weakest, like to-day, for instance.

RHODA—[*Coming over to him and putting her arms around his neck.*] That was my fault. I'm sorry. You're strong, stronger than any man . . . almost as strong as God himself.

GILCHRIST—[*Kissing her.*] You make me strong.

He hugs her to him and puts his face against her hair. The door at the left rear opens cautiously and old JACOB *sticks his head in.*

JACOB—Kin a pore soul come in?

GILCHRIST—[*Releasing* RHODA.] Come on in.

Old JACOB *comes in, followed by* SION. *They are both dressed in their preaching clothes.* JACOB *with an old seedy brown suit, a collar without a tie and a brown derby.* SION *wears the same clothes as before, and his hair still keeps its greasy curls. They*

respectfully sit down near the fire, and HARDY *reseats himself.* SION *at once begins to polish his finger-nails and arrange his hair with his little looking-glass.*

JACOB—How's little Hardy coming on?

RHODA—No better.

JACOB—Ah, that's bad.

GILCHRIST—Oh, yes.

JACOB—Hanh?

GILCHRIST—It's bad, of course.

JACOB—Oh, yeh, as I said.

HARDY *stands up, turns moodily about the room, and sits down again. The eyes of* JACOB *and* RHODA *follow him.*

GILCHRIST—You gonna be here long, Jacob?

JACOB—I dunno, I mought.

GILCHRIST—I got to go up and bury my big hog and I wish you'd keep Rhody company a bit.

JACOB—Great goodness, is your prize hog dead, too?

GILCHRIST—Yes, dead . . . [*Echoing.*] "too."

JACOB—[*With a groan.*] Anh!

GILCHRIST—And "anh."

JACOB—Warnings on top o' warnings.

GILCHRIST—[*Snapping his fingers.*] Yes, yes, all the time warnings!

JACOB—[*Studying.*] When'd you find him dead?

GILCHRIST—'Bout half a' hour ago.

JACOB—[*Raising his eyes sanctimoniously aloft.*] And I know what's behind it.

GILCHRIST—Yes, you do.

RHODA—There's nothing behind it.

JACOB—You don't go to church, and a sign comes.

RHODA—Stop now, Jacob.

JACOB—And why didn't you come to church? Everybody was there and we waited fer you and they all said you'd come fer they knowed you was a man of your promise.

GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly striking his thigh.*] There again!

JACOB—And then you didn't and we sent up a hundred prayers for your soul, didn't we, Sion?

SION—[*Morosely.*] They prayed and prayed.

GILCHRIST—Thank 'ee.

JACOB—And we prayed for the whole neighborhood to be delivered from the curse of yer transgression.

GILCHRIST—Jacob, I'd be much obliged if you'd go on now and leave us.

JACOB—I'm going then, but they's others'll not go so easy. If you'd a-heard that preacher it'd a-melted yer heart.

GILCHRIST—He come here yesterday to melt my heart.

JACOB—Yeh, and he jest about had ye marching to the house of God.

GILCHRIST—Not him—mebbe.

RHODA—I asked him to go.

JACOB—You?—Thank the Lord.

RHODA—I knew he'd go over there and stand up to you all.

JACOB—[*Watching her.*] Ah, it was enough to break down a heart of stone to see the brethren and sistern weeping over yer lost estate. My own eyes still burn from they tears. [GILCHRIST *stares at the floor saying nothing.*] And the preacher is on his way here with a committee to wrastle with yer unforgiving sperit, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—Here?

JACOB—They're coming up the road.

GILCHRIST—[*Nervously.*] I'm going now to bury my hog.

He stands up.

RHODA—[*Her face hardening.*] Let them come on. Show them who you are. [*Suddenly fighting back the tears.*] It's not right for them to worry you so. They don't know you. It's a sin for them to torment you, and you the best man in the world. [*Turning to* JACOB, *the tears beginning to pour down her face.*] Why, he is, Jacob. You know he is. Look how much good he does for people. And God himself could be no better to me. [*Hotly.*] It's because he's got more sense than all of them put together, and is better.

She finally controls herself and stares at old JACOB *malignantly.*

JACOB—[*Stirring uneasily.*] Oh, yes, good in a world'y way. But that won't save yer soul—plenty o' heathens is good, Mis' Rhody.

GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly shaking himself.*] I ought to've gone to church.

RHODA—And I ought not to've asked you.

GILCHRIST—They had my promise. I could have stood and answered 'em word for word, argument for argument, they couldn't a-beat me down. [*Broodingly.*] I don't know, Rhody, maybe I——

She looks at him, saying nothing.

JACOB—[*Angrily.*] You can throw off on us pore folks, Mis' Rhody, but the preacher's got plenty of sense and he'll speak fer us.

GILCHRIST—Yes, let 'em come on and talk to me.

MAG *comes in suddenly from the rear, wearing an old cape over her head.*

MAG—They's some folks coming up the lane there—— My, it's beginning to rain outside. . . .

RHODA—Mag, roll him in the other room.

MAG—[*Rolling the baby into the room at the left.*] Come on, precious. He sleeps and sleeps.

RHODA—[*Shivering and drawing a cloak up from the depths of her chair around her shoulders.*] It's cold to be in April.

GILCHRIST *starts and stirs the fire.*

GILCHRIST—Jacob, I'd be much obliged if you'd leave us now.

JACOB—[*Testily.*] All right. I ain't a hand to be where I ain't wanted. Come on, Sion. [SION *puts away his mirror and follows him. At the rear door* JACOB *turns and looks back.*] They ain't nobody prayed fer ye harder'n me, Hardy.

GILCHRIST—[*Impassively.*] Much obliged. [JACOB *and* SION *go out.* GILCHRIST *stands punching the fire with the toe of his shoe, leaning his elbow on the mantel.*] Look, Rhody, that knife-blade's red-hot.

RHODA—Yes.

GILCHRIST—[*Tapping his lips.*] It looks like a long finger stuck out—even like a body lying straight in the fires o' hell.

RHODA—[*As* MAG *returns.*] You can go on and cook dinner now, Mag.

MAG—All right'm.

She picks up a straw broom from the chimney corner and sweeps the hearth.

GILCHRIST—How's Lonie to-day?

MAG—She sets looking at the fire, that's all.

GILCHRIST—Ah!

MAG—Yes, that's all.

She goes out at the rear.

GILCHRIST—I ought to've gone to the church. Then you wouldn't have to stand this. Go on into the other room and let 'em talk to me alone.

RHODA—A long time ago you said my place was with you.

GILCHRIST—[*Kissing her with sudden fervor.*] And it is . . . Ah, I don't know how I lived them years without you.

RHODA—[*Putting her hands on his head.*] And don't let me ever fail you.

GILCHRIST—[*Flinging out his hands suddenly.*]

I could stand anything, have stood it. When it comes to people like them out there—good and kind and wanting to help us—then—well—I don't know, I don't know, I tell you. [*Intensively.*] Why, Rhody, they're my own people, my folks. They love me and I love them. We know one another. All the year and last year a kind of wall has been growing up between us. [*Half to himself.*] I got to break it down somehow.

RHODA—If they loved you would they hurt you so?

GILCHRIST—[*Smiling and shaking his head.*] You already know the answer, honey.

RHODA—[*Wonderingly.*] Because they love us they hurt us? [*Running the words over.*] Love and suffering, love and suffering . . . so we know it well.

GILCHRIST—We're all alike down deep. I used to say so. Something in our heads we got, something different, God's maybe . . . principles we follow after—I've thought about it a heap.

RHODA—[*Uncertainly.*] Theirs is in heaven, ours nearer with us, like we prayed on the porch that evening. And a great gulf as far as to the sky divides them.

GILCHRIST—Yes, here with us . . . Wisht we could go on believing.

RHODA—We can.

GILCHRIST—[*Abruptly.*] I don't know.

RHODA—Hardy.

GILCHRIST—[*Going to the window at their right.*] Old Aunt Margaret comes there tramping in the rain. She nursed my mother the night I was born and come and help lay her out when she died. And every meeting year after year she's sent up a prayer for my soul. She's put her own boys away in the graveyard and loves me like a son in their place. And there's old Mis' Jones and Mis' Jernigan with her. They've all suffered and followed their God to the tomb. And the preacher leads 'em, the preacher coming here to gather my soul into heaven. And he's a good man, a thousand times better than me. He'd lay down his life for our little boy in there even and I wouldn't. [*Turning back into the room with a despairing gesture.*] Ah, there you are.

RHODA—Push it back from you.

GILCHRIST—Who could fight against 'em when they've suffered so? Like me they've suffered. Yea, more, and I feel for 'em and they feel for me. [*Steps are heard coming up the porch at the left front. A knock sounds on the door and* GILCHRIST *calls:*] Come in!

Three old women enter at the left front dressed in their crude Sunday clothes, their faces hid under big black slat-bonnets. The preacher, a thin middle-aged man with a pale, gentle face, follows them. He is dressed in cheap baggy clothes and carries a Bible in his hands. Without a word the women pass by GIL-

CHRIST, *clasp his hand a moment and look beseechingly up into his face with eyes red from weeping. Then they move on to* RHODA, *kiss her on the forehead, and get down on their knees in different parts of the room, bending their heads over on the seats of chairs and praying silently.* GILCHRIST *looks about him in consternation, makes a gesture of supplication towards them and then turns to* RHODA, *but she suddenly hides her face in her hands, crushed under their gentleness. He motions the preacher to a chair and sits down holding his head in his hand.*

PREACHER—[*Quietly.*] We've been moved to come to ye, Brother Gilchrist.

GILCHRIST—I'm sorry.

PREACHER—We've had a great outpouring of the spirit at the church to-day. God said come.

He smiles at GILCHRIST *wanly.*

GILCHRIST—[*Kindly.*] Thank you, we both thank you.

OLD MARGARET—[*At her chair, whispering.*] Lord, hear our prayer.

GILCHRIST *flinches at her words.*

PREACHER—We want to read a word of scripture and have a prayer with ye.

He looks at GILCHRIST *pleadingly.*

GILCHRIST—I don't know——

RHODA—Yes, let him, Hardy.

GILCHRIST *bows his head in acquiescence, and the* PREACHER *opens his Bible.*

PREACHER—[*Pulling at his collar.*] These are the words of God, not my words, brother. Though his words be like goads to the flesh, blessed be his holy name, they are just and full of mercy. For he hath said again and again that the proud heart goeth before destruction and the haughty spirit before a fall. [*Reading.*] "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth. And a word spoken in due season, how good it is. The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath. [*More loudly.*] The Lord will destroy the house of the proud; but he will establish the border of the widow. [*His voice breaking in the room clear and bell-like.*] The thoughts of the weeked are an abomination to the Lord; but the words of the pure are pleasant words. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer; but the mouth of the weeked poureth out evil things. The Lord is far from the weeked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat. The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul; but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility." [JACOB *and* SION *have crept*

in at the rear. The PREACHER *closes the Bible.*] Let us pray.

He gets down on his knees and JACOB *does likewise.* SION *looks on with his mouth agape and finally he bows down.* RHODA *and* GILCHRIST *sit bent over in their seats.*

GILCHRIST—[*Softly.*] Go in your room, Rhody, and shut the door.

She makes no reply as the PREACHER *begins to pray.*

PREACHER—O Lord, come down now and be close to us and hear our prayer, give us strength, give our word strength, let it bring forth fruit from the heart of this man and this woman.

OLD MARGARET—[*Twisting her head against her chair.*] O Lord, do, Lord, adder these hyuh many years!

PREACHER—Day in and day out, night after night, we have called upon thee to bring these erring children, man and woman, man and wife in thy sight, towards thy holy throne. Thy ways are past understanding and we needs must continue to pray, holding on to thy promise, beseeching thee to save these for whom our hearts do ache and bleed. [*Old* JACOB *and the women answer with deep groans.*] Thou sawest the tears of thy children shed for them to-day, thou sendest thy holy spirit down to seal our hearts and give the message unto us. And we have obeyed

thee, we have come to the threshold of this home to do thy will. And it please thy blessed name we shall not go away until thou hast sentest thy blessing to this afflicted house. Yea, Lord! Yea, Lord!

MARGARET—Amen. [*The others answer her.*] Hardy, can't ye see how we love ye and her!

GILCHRIST—Rhody, please don't stay in here.

PREACHER—[*His voice gathering strength.*] And thou hast promised thy wrath to them who sit in the seat of the scornful. Listen, Lord.

OLD MARGARET—Do, Lord. Save my boy.

THE OTHERS—Do, Lord.

PREACHER—Listen to our prayer, to the voice of thy children crying out of this dark world towards the gates of the New Jerusalem. Answer us and send thy power on this man. Touch him with thy finger that he may know thee as God, the very God, the Most High, the ruler of the firmament, the Alpha and Omega and the Great I Am. For thou art all good, all kind, and lovest all. This man and woman art precious in thy sight. You love them the way they love their little boy!

OLD MARGARET—[*With a low moan.*] Yea, Lord.

The two women and JACOB *groan and mumble after her.*

PREACHER—[*Beginning to beat on the floor with*

his hands.] Thou hast sentest warning and warning to him and he heeded them not. And woe, woe, woe, when thy wrath is loosed in the judgment day. For it is all prophesied and promised to them that forget God. Thou gavest him a saintly wife for ten years and five and she wrestled with his soul to bring it to the fold of thy salvation. And on her dying bed she warned him and he heeded her not. Yea, his proud spirit sent her to her grave. [GILCHRIST *jerks up his head.*] And who knows why he heeded her not? Yea, even so, she died so suddenly! The neighbors came and found her dead and another woman beside him. Lord, if there's evil hid away there make him confess and bring it to the light.

RHODA—[*Moaning.*] Stop it! Stop it!

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up and then sitting again.*] Great God!

JACOB—Lord, thou wilt bring all that is hid away to light.

PREACHER—[*Slashing his arms around him.*] Thou canst see into his heart, whe'r it's all black and vile there, what thoughts he's had, what he's planned in the night, for thou seest all.

OLD MARGARET—[*Turning and embracing* GILCHRIST'S *feet.*] Confess it all, Hardy, clean out yer heart and save yer pore soul.

He stares at her uncomprehendingly, shaking his

head now and then as if trying to rid himself of a dream.

PREACHER—And thou hast seen it all and marked it all. Thou has set a curse upon him since the day Sister Etta, a saint of God, died in this house. And yet thou lovest him, we all do. Thou sentest a young man, pore soul, who took his own life as a warning and still this man heeded thee not.

GILCHRIST—[*Hoarsely.*] Spare me something.

PREACHER—He heeded thee not. And thou hast marked him down in thy book and we thy children see thy wrath breaking upon him and breaking upon us. [*He wrings his hands and twists about the floor, his voice rising into a croon now and then, and the tears wetting his cheeks.*] The lightning came in the summer and struck his barns as a message of thy wrath. His crops begun to fail him and disease has come among his cattle and his stock. [*Wildly.*] Yea, thou art God of all things and there's none beside thee. Crucify him, Lord, until he sees the light. I would I could be crucified in his stead, but he must save himself and die unto salvation. [*He hesitates a moment as if listening for a message, and then his voice breaks forth jubilantly.*] I hear you, Lord, and receive thy word. Yea, thou wilt continue to persecute him, thou sendest me thy promise. Stretch him on the rack, for it is the way to his salvation. Already thou hast laid hand on his little son—keep it on him —take him away to make his proud heart yield. For

he's a murderer, murderer! [*His voice sharp as a knife.*] And we know it, his neighbors know it!

THE WOMEN—Oh, Lord, ha' mercy!

PREACHER—Yea, he stands condemned as a murderer, a destroyer of life. So is he in the minds of his people. And so he will stand until he do confess and humble himself before Almighty God. As thou hast said, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me." [*In a hollow voice.*] "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even——"

RHODA—Have mercy on us, have mercy.

She rises from her seat, turns helplessly about and then flees into the room at the left. GILCHRIST *pays no attention to her, but sits rocking his head from side to side. The women suddenly burst forth in a frenzy of lamentation and prayer: "Lordy, Lord, keep thy hand on him, bow down his will—save him, Jesus, save him. Let us have the light—the light for the darkness—tear the scales from his eyes—have Mercy!" The preacher leans his head over on the floor shivering.*

JACOB—[*Beginning to clap his hands.*] Thy will, Holy Father, thy will be done. [*His voice choking with sobs.*] Save him, Our Father, save Hardy Gilchrist from the burning pit.

MAG *comes in from the rear, watches a moment wide-eyed and then goes quickly out.* SION *sits back on his heels looking on, and now and then he wipes the*

tears from his eyes with his dirty handkerchief. The PREACHER *on his knees feels blankly around him, touches a chair and leans weakly against it, mopping his face with trembling hands.* OLD MARGARET *breaks forth into loud screams, and rising to her feet, throws her arms ecstatically around* GILCHRIST, *hugging him to her breast.*

OLD MARGARET—Glory to God! Glory to God! Hardy, boy, cain't ye confess yer sins fer me and save yourself in heaven. Yer pore mother is up there, Etta's up there watching for ye to come to God. [*She falls on his neck weeping piteously. The other women come and crouch down at his feet.* OLD MARGARET *raises* GILCHRIST'S *head and looks him in the face.*] Look at me, Hardy, look at the tears all of us is shedding fer ye. You're my little boy and my pore old heart aches fer ye.

GILCHRIST—[*Brokenly.*] Don't, Aunt Margaret. [*Catching her hands hungrily and staring at them.*] Pore hands that worked for me, cared for me—— Oh, God!

OLD MARGARET—And they will to the end. [*Sobbing.*] They ain't nothing I wouldn't do fer ye, boy. I love ye better'n my own, that's dead and gone. I'm a mother to ye.

GILCHRIST—[*Convulsively.*] Mother!

OLD MARGARET—[*Falling on her knees and laying her head in his lap.*] Son! My son, my boy!

Her bonnet is pushed back and GILCHRIST *gently touches her gray wispy hair. At his touch she throws her hands over her head, feverishly clasping his.*

PREACHER—[*Turning and crying out.*] A man who mought be a prophet among us. Purify him, Lord, and let him lead!

THE OTHERS—Let him go before us.

PREACHER—And we will stand with him in that great day. [*Shouting.*] In that great day that's coming.

Standing up and beginning to sing:

There's a great day a-coming, a great day a-coming,
There's a great day a-coming by and by.

The women climb to their feet singing and clapping their hands.

When the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left—
Are you ready for that day to come?

Old JACOB *rises to his feet singing.* SION *clambers up after him, his fresh voice rising beautiful and clear. The song mounts into a high mournful harmony as the singers draw up and encircle* GILCHRIST.

Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready for that day to come?

Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready for the judgment day?

GILCHRIST *suddenly stands up and looms above them.*

There's a sad day a-coming, a sad day a-coming,
There's a sad day a-coming by and by,
When the sinner shall hear his doom,
"Depart, I know ye not!"
Are you ready for that day to come?

GILCHRIST—[*His face pale and drawn.*] Stop it, let me say something—— [*His words piling out, low and vehement.*] I don't want her to know it, I don't want Rhody to hear. But it's been eating in me—here—— [*Striking his breast.*] I been trying to get away from it. I don't know what to do about it. I've tried to pray——

PREACHER—Bless the Lord!

GILCHRIST—It won't come right—I know there's something wrong somewhere. I don't let her know—don't let her know. I hold up strong before her—I keep fighting—fighting without the light seems like—and things keep going against me. Maybe you're right—don't try me no more, leave me to myself. I got to see it for myself——

OLD MARGARET *watches him happily, her toothless jaws trembling with eagerness.*

PREACHER—God can clear it up.

GILCHRIST—[*Going on monotonously.*] Everything is all mixed up, my head seems all dead and cold—I keep lying awake at night—I don't tell her—I don't let her know—— I keep trying and saying we'll make it—I got to think it out, there's a way out—— Last night I saw a thousand faces looking at me. [*Half whining as he turns upon them.*] You come digging in my heart, you make me say things, you cut me in here like a knife—— [*To himself.*] The preacher said you killed Etta—— Murderer! Murderer!—He says God knows all the blackness in my heart—— I'll see about it, I'll see. . . . "Ye are cursed with a curse . . ." Ah! . . . [*Pushing his way through them.*] Hardy Gilchrist never killed anybody, never hurt anybody—— Didn't he? There's been death all around me—Etta, Neill—— Something's all mixed up—— [SION *continues singing, caught in the spell of the music, his face rapt and lifted towards the sky.* GILCHRIST *suddenly throws his arms around those nearest him.*] You are my own people, born with me in these fields, and I feel humbled down before you, you break my heart in two. Yea, the low and the high, the strong and the weak, all are one. I know nothing but that. [*Lifting up his voice.*] Where is this God? Let him speak to me and I would answer him. He knows my heart! Proud! I'm not proud!

He drops on his knees before SION *and bends his head to the floor.* SION *sings on unconscious of him.*

THE OTHERS—[*In a burst of fervor.*] Glory hallelujah! He'll see the light! God have mercy!

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up.*] Let me alone! [*Raising his head.*] All right. You use my people to crush me! Let it be you and me, man to man. I'll go talk to you, and you answer me!

He turns quickly and dashes out at the rear. They watch him go wonderingly, and then one by one they raise their illumined faces in song.

Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready for that day to come?

The music swells into a high fervid harmony. In the midst of the singing RHODA *bursts in from the room at the left.*

RHODA—[*Screaming at them.*] You stop that and leave this house! Where's Hardy? You're trying to kill him. He's a thousand times better than you all, better than anybody, better than God is. . . . He loves all of you and that's why you . . . [*They sing on, paying no attention to her, their faces set in ecstasy.*] Hardy! Hardy!

She rushes through the door at the left rear after him. Presently MAG *comes in leading her. She goes up to the* PREACHER, *starts to strike him, and then flings herself down on the floor sobbing. The music rises triumphant above her and* MAG *comes softly forward and bends down by her prostrate form.*

Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready for the judgment day?

The curtain is lowered and the music dies away. When it comes up again, several hours have elapsed. It is late at night of the same day. A fire is blazing in the fireplace and outside the wind and the rain drive through the trees and against the house in great droning gusts. RHODA *sits by the baby's cradle as before. Now and then as the wind and rain swoop down in sudden violence, she lifts a pale anguished face to listen. Presently* MAG *comes in from the rear porch carrying an unlighted lamp and a coffee pot. She sets the lamp on the bureau, lights it and begins to heat the pot on a bed of coals at the hearth.*

RHODA—Have you heard anything—anybody shouting?

MAG—No'm, nothing yit.

RHODA—I thought I heard his voice a while ago—in the wind, far-off like.

MAG—It was them trees out there bending and squeaking. Don't you worry, he'll be shore to come in a minute.

RHODA—Something's happened to him, something terrible.

MAG—I've told you a hundred times, Mis' Rhody, he'd come back in a little bit.

She puts wood on the fire and sweeps the hearth.

RHODA—Ah, but the clock's struck 'leven and he's not here.

MAG—Cain't nothing happen to a big well man like him.

RHODA—He's sick. They did it with their preaching. They just about broke his heart and mine too.

MAG—He's off hunting the sow that's found pigs in the pasture, that's what I bet.

RHODA—Oh, me!

MAG—Have you fed the baby?

RHODA—Fed him?

MAG—Ah . . . Jacob'll soon be hyuh and give us news. Mebbe they're coming back together.

RHODA—If he could a-found him in the field he'd been back long ago.

MAG—I'll have you some coffee in a bit. It'll warm you up and make you feel better.

RHODA—I can't drink a drop.

MAG—But you ain't et a bite all day. You got to eat, Mis' Rhody, and git your strength back.

RHODA—I don't want my strength back. Oh, I don't want to live any more, Mag. Can't we have any peace?

MAG—[*Wiping her eyes with her apron.*] Now, now,

in a week you'll be up a-singing about the house. You must stop worrying so for the baby's sake. [*She sets a chair with hanging clothes to the fire to dry.* RHODA *rises and makes her way to the window and stands staring out.*] You'd better come back to the fire, Mis' Rhody, you'll ketch your death o' cold there.

RHODA—Listen to that wind and that rain, rain, rain, day and night, day and night. Won't it ever stop? [*Turning to* MAG *and clutching her feverishly.*] Get somebody to make it stop, Mag! I can't stand it any more. [*Crying out.*] Somebody make it stop pouring down, and Hardy out there lost in it! [*She turns and stares abstractedly in the fire as if fascinated with some inner absorption. Her voice rises husky and level.*] I know now. Hardy's dead!

MAG—Nanh—nanh—he's as much alive as you or me.

RHODA—I don't believe it. I can't believe it. I can't believe nothing except he's dead. I've prayed and prayed to God; Mag, I prayed all the evening, but God won't hear me. Ah, he's set his curse on us forever.

MAG—You better go lie back down now. It'll fair off to-morrow and the sun'll be out again, and Mr. Hardy'll be back and all'll be fine.

She starts leading her across the room to the left. Suddenly the raindrops burst on the roof like a pat-

ter of gravel thrown, and a sharp gust of wind sucks the flame out of the lamp.

RHODA—[*Shrieking.*] Somebody blowed out the lamp!

MAG—[*Hurriedly getting a match from the mantelpiece and striking it.*] It was the wind. It blew sudden under the door there.

She lights it again.

RHODA—[*Shivering and speaking in a throaty whisper.*] It's her, Mag. She's back here. Don't you reckon so?

MAG—[*Starting with terror.*] Anh?

RHODA—She's never left us, Mag. [*Pointing to the bedroom at the rear.*] She stays in there. I hear her at night moving about, slipping around. I know it's her. [*She tiptoes across the room to the door at the right rear and tries the knob.*] I got her locked in, but she can get out, Mag, she comes through the key-hole. She wants to steal the baby, wants to kill him. Don't you tell Hardy when he comes. He don't know. I heard the bed-springs pop in there about dark and she got up and opened her trunk for something. I heard her plain. And I run and locked the door tight. [*Moaning.*] But she can get out.

MAG—Lord a-mercy!

RHODA—And at night I'd wake up and hear her playing her organ in there and singing.

MAG—[*Nervously.*] Come on to bed now.

She puts her arm around her and leads her across the room.

RHODA—You saw her once too, Mag. Jacob said you did.

MAG—No, no, I didn't. It was more of Jacob's lies.

RHODA—[*Drawing back from her bedroom door.*] I'm a-scared to go in there.

MAG—There's your bed in there.

RHODA—Hardy's in there. He'll hurt me.

MAG—[*Staring at her.*] What's the matter, Mis' Rhody?

RHODA—[*Shaking her head and brushing her hand across her face.*] I'm kinder lost or something. Let me lie down now.

MAG *helps her in to bed, comes out and closes the door. She takes the poker and stirs the fire into crackling flames.*

MAG—[*Crouching down by the hearth.*] A-ah, the end of the world's coming on us. [*The door at the left rear opens gently and* JACOB *comes in with a lantern. His old rain-coat and felt hat are streaming with water, and a blast of rainy wind blows in behind*

him. MAG *starts up at the suddenness of his entrance.*] Jacob, I didn't hear you.

JACOB—[*Softly.*] I didn't want to skeer her. Where is she?

MAG—[*Lowering her voice.*] Laid down a minute.

RHODA—[*Inside.*] Jacob, Jacob!

The door opens and she bursts in.

JACOB—I was hoping mebbe he'd come while I was gone. I ain't found him.

RHODA—[*Staring before her.*] He's in the creek drowned!

MAG—[*Coming to her and leading her back into her room.*] We'll find him, we will.

JACOB—Yes'm, I'm going to git Sandy and we'll find him. Don't you worry.

MAG—[*Coming out of the room and closing the door.*] Pore thing!

JACOB—Aye, pitiful!

MAG—Didn't you see no sign?

JACOB—His tracks led off 'crost the bottom to the woods, and then I couldn't follow him.

MAG—No telling what's happened. Why'd you all come hyuh and try to run him out'n his senses?

JACOB—[*Warming himself.*] The sperit led us and

you oughta helped. Laord in heaven, sich a sorrowful house—a-ah!

He takes off his coat and sits down.

MAG—I'm going on home now and I want you to stay.

JACOB—[*Starting up.*] Nanh, nanh, I ain't gonna stay hyuh by myself.

MAG—They ain't nothing to hurt you, Jacob. I got to see about Lonie.

JACOB—This house's accursed, Mag, you said so.

MAG—[*Resignedly.*] Aye, it is, I reckon.

JACOB—If you go and leave, I'm going too.

MAG—I ain't slept in it a night since they was married and I don't 'spec' to. When I stayed I sot up.

JACOB—Aye.

MAG—I did.

JACOB—[*Taking up his lantern.*] I'm going to find Hardy and bring him home if he's to be found.

MAG—[*Stepping before him.*] No, you ain't. You got to stay with me. She makes me skeered saying Mis' Etta's in the house.

JACOB—Hanh?—It's her being sick so long makes her think it, you reckon?

MAG—I reckon. She ain't well by no means. She

hadn't ort to be out'n that bed, fer she give birth the hardest I've ever seed fer a healthy woman. [*Going over to the crib.*] And any minute now it'll die.

JACOB—[*Setting down his lantern.*] Anh! You've been faithful to 'em, Mag.

MAG—Lord, listen at that wind and rain!

JACOB—The whole world'll be washed away yit. They'll be a second Noey's flood.

A heavy step sounds on the rear porch. JACOB *and* MAG *stand fearfully away from the left rear door.*

MAG—That's him, that's him at last, Jacob!

JACOB—I knowed he'd come. [*The door opens and* GILCHRIST *enters. He is hatless and drenched to the skin, his face haggard. He comes in and sits by the fire without a word.*] Is that you, Hardy, safe at last?

GILCHRIST—[*Softly.*] Is Rhody asleep?

JACOB—Where've you been? We've scoured the country for you.

MAG—She's in there.

RHODA—[*With a scream of joy within.*] Hardy!

As he goes into her room, she springs forward to meet him and throws her arms around him sobbing. MAG *goes over and closes the door, and* RHODA'S *voice comes mumbling and broken from the room.*

JACOB—[*Picking up his lantern.*] Anh, I don't understand it.

MAG—Air you going now?

JACOB—Adder I walk my legs off—a-hunting him, in he comes. He'd ort to be carried to Raleigh and put in the 'sylum. I'm going on now.

MAG—[*Getting her cape and bonnet from the corner and putting them on.*] I'm going with you.

JACOB—I'll be dead with a cold from this.

They start out.

MAG—Mebbe we'd better not leave 'em, Jacob, what you say?

JACOB—I'm a-going, I tell you.

MAG—I don't like——

She stands a moment undecided.

RHODA—[*Coming suddenly into the room.*] Don't go, Mag, don't go. Stay with me, you and Jacob!

MAG—You'll be all right now, Mis' Rhody. He's back. . . . You and him go to sleep. I'll come down in the morning, God willing.

RHODA—[*Beseechingly.*] No, no, you mustn't go, I'm afraid. . . .

MAG—I cain't. I cain't stay another minute, Mis' Rhoda.

She and JACOB *go out quickly.*

RHODA—[*Going to the bedroom door.*] Come on, dry yourself. [*Fearfully.*] What you hunting for, Hardy?

GILCHRIST—[*Within.*] I can't find it nowhere. [*There is a sound of closing drawers and* GILCHRIST *comes into the room.*] Have you seen it, Etta?

RHODA—[*Starting.*] What you want?

GILCHRIST—[*With a queer smile.*] I'd always put it where I couldn't find it, and when I'd want to shave I'd ask Etta where it was.

RHODA—[*Throwing her arms around him.*] Hardy, you've scared us all to death. I've cried and prayed for you all the evening.

GILCHRIST—[*Pushing her from him.*] Yeh, yeh, sorrow and tears is our lot.

He rummages in the drawers of the bureau. RHODA *moves unsteadily over to him and clings to him.*

RHODA—Hardy, you're scaring me again. Come to the fire; you're wringing wet.

GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly shouting out and striking her.*] Keep your hands away from me, you sinful woman! [*She staggers back from him and falls weakly into the rocking chair, staring at him terrified. For a moment he stands gazing back at her and then*

with a cry he runs to her and buries his face in her lap.] No, no, honey, I didn't mean it. I'm crazy, crazy! [*His voice rising high in pain.*] Why won't they let me alone!

He hugs her to him convulsively, his shoulders rocking and heaving.

RHODA—Don't worry, don't think of it any more. I'll take care of you. [*Stroking his head.*] Nothing can't bother you now.

GILCHRIST—[*Raising his head.*] There's somebody hammering and beating in my head, beating on an anvil with a sledge-hammer. [*Hitting his breast with his fists.*] And I'm stifling in here. [*Suddenly he stands up and his face hardens into its former cold and haggard look.*] I hear something like a voice talking to me in a field a thousand miles from here.

He moves away from her and begins searching through the drawers, on the mantel, and around the room.

RHODA—Hardy!

GILCHRIST—Somebody's hid it.

RHODA—[*Gasping.*] Come back, come back, you're sick.

GILCHRIST—[*Turning quickly towards her.*] Sick—you and me—sick unto death and they ain't enough doctors in the world to cure us. I know it now.

RHODA—[*Stretching out her hands.*] Come back to my arms, Hardy. I'll save you!

GILCHRIST—[*Starting back.*] Look, look, there's blood on your hands. [*Holding out his hands.*] And there's blood on mine. Blood everywhere. You and me killed her and we killed him.

RHODA—[*Shuddering.*] Ah.

GILCHRIST—And blood must pay for blood. [*He feels in the lower drawer of the bureau and takes out something.*] You thought I wouldn't find it, did you?

RHODA—[*Staring at him in horror.*] I didn't know it was there.

GILCHRIST—I've got it now.

RHODA—[*Staggering across the room to the door at the rear and pulling it open.*] Help, help!

GILCHRIST—[*Sitting down by the fire and looking before him.*] Don't cry and scream. I'm not going to hurt you.

RHODA *creeps back to her chair and sits down, watching him with wide eyes.*

RHODA—Hardy, don't look like that. What's happened?

GILCHRIST—That's a good fire there. Dry oak wood burns fine, a red flame in front and a blue one behind—hot as hell—and red as blood. . . . There's

a plenty of wood under the shelter to last you till warm weather, ain't there?

RHODA—Yes, yes, but it don't matter now.

GILCHRIST—A good farmer is always prepared for anything that happens—a woodpile full of wood for bad weather and plenty of corn for his stock, ain't he?

RHODA—Yes, yes.

GILCHRIST—[*Bitterly.*] Is he? Hanh, no man knows what's liable to come upon him, no man knows what a fix his mind can get in, does he?

RHODA—Maybe not, maybe he can't know. But forget it, forget it all.

GILCHRIST—Nobody but God knows what's going to happen, and he won't tell no man. I went out in the rain there to talk with their God, to match muscle with him—to get at the truth. Oh—we are blind and scared like chickens before a hawk. A sparrow sets on the ditch bank and a snake raises his head and swallows him, and with my briar-hook I come along and kill that snake. Aye, God mebbe is lying in wait with his hook same as if I was a snake. That's what Neill called me—called me a snake, a snake in the grass. You heard him that day.

RHODA—That's all done been forgot long, long ago, Hardy. Rest your poor mind from it.

GILCHRIST—It's fresh with me now same as yesterday. [*Stretching out his arms.*] When my grand-

mammy died it was a cold winter day and I was a little boy no higher'n this chair I'm setting in. I was out in the yard playing marbles, and before she died I heard a sweet cheeping sound and I looked up and a little bird as white as snow was setting on the comb of the house. And it was singing so pitiful-like it made me want to cry. I run in the house to tell Muh and there they was all sitting around still as death and Grandmuh was stretched out long and stiff under a sheet. There come a whirring sound in the room and that little bird went flying around and around over the bed cheeping like its heart was broke. Then it flew out of the door and across the field. At the burying that day, after they put flowers on the grave, it come up out of the woods and perched itself on the headboard singing its song. When they weren't nobody looking I took my bean-shooter and shot at it and scared it away. They said after it was grandmuh's soul.

RHODA—[*Trembling.*] What is it?

GILCHRIST—I saw that little bird again to-day setting on the fence in the graveyard. But I didn't have my bean-shooter with me, I'm too old.

RHODA—Was that where you've been, Hardy?

GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly standing up with a bitter laugh.*] When you and me die there won't be no little snow-white bird singing for us, will there? There'll be a buzzard setting on the roof of this house and his'll be the only mourning. [RHODA

stares at him in amazement.] I'm going out to the barn now. Yeh, I went out to meet him and he was too much——

RHODA—No, no! You mustn't leave me!

GILCHRIST—I won't be long. I heard a plank flopping in the wind there and it's got to be nailed up and the mules ain't been fed, poor things. [*As he starts out* RHODA *springs up and clings to him. He throws her from him into the rocking chair and stands gazing at her cowering in her seat.*] Look at that hair and eyes and breast I've felt against my face night after night. I've drunk 'em down like a man perished and starved for a cool spring and they've et up my vitals. All the time it was a harlot sucking my soul out'n me . . . maybe so.

RHODA—O God, have mercy upon me!

GILCHRIST—Ah, it was.

He turns and strides out at the left rear, leaving the door open. The wind and the rain blow in scattering the sparks through the room. RHODA *bends over in her chair rocking and moaning with her head in her arms. Then she springs up and starts after him. Presently the child emits a thin high wail in its crib, gasps once or twice and is silent.* RHODA *turns and snatches it frantically up in her arms, walking back and forth across the room, feeling its feet, rubbing its body and crooning over it. After a moment she runs to the door at the rear.*

RHODA—[*Shrieking.*] Hardy! Hardy! [*She starts to dash out through the door, but a rush of wind and water breaks across her and the baby. Looking down at the bundle in her arms, she wraps it protectingly from the storm and then turns helplessly back into the room. Presently she goes over to* MRS. GILCHRIST'S *bedroom door and stands before it cold and straight.*] And you could get out. . . . You've had your way and taken him at last. You had no heart. . . . A good woman! . . . Ah, cold and dark as the grave itself. Death, bloody and cruel death, reaching out and taking life. . . . Now you can rest and be satisfied. . . . Aunt Etta, I never bothered you, I never hurt you. Still you won't let us be . . . Jesus! Jesus! . . . [*Sobbing, she lays the baby back in its crib and bows over it in heartbroken grief. And for a long while she bends her head crushed and stupefied. Then she moves uncertainly over before the fire and gradually raises her head and looks before her, her face settling into a cold impassive mask.*] Take all I've got then and drive me from the face of the earth. . . . Aunt Etta! God! [*Clenching her fist.*] And you can kill me, but I hate you for it all. Kill me, crucify me and I'll not bow my knee now. My tongue will not confess you. [GILCHRIST *opens the door and comes in. He sits down as before. A gasp breaks from her.*] Thank the Lord!

GILCHRIST—I heard a voice calling seemed like. A long ways off.

RHODA—It was me calling for you.

GILCHRIST—Aye.

He sits staring abstractedly at the fire.

RHODA—I was calling for you.

GILCHRIST—[*Starting.*] He stuck his nose out of the stall and whickered at me and rubbed my shoulder. [*Shuddering.*] And that plank ain't nailed. [*Raising his head.*] I hear it banging.

RHODA—Yes. . . .

GILCHRIST—The cow was breathing soft and the pigs grunting and rubbing by the well-post. [*Shivering.*] It was all so plain, like I've heard them all my days.

RHODA—[*To herself.*] And it said woe to them that strive with the maker of heaven and earth.

GILCHRIST—[*Watching her.*] Yea, woe! Woe here and woe hereafter in hell where you and me'll maybe burn forever and ever.

RHODA—[*Starting and turning toward him.*] It must be easier there.

GILCHRIST—She put a curse on us and we fed our lust on top of her grave.

RHODA—Let God judge.

GILCHRIST—[*Suddenly striking his breast and crying out in a loud voice.*] He set his mark on

me and branded me and hunted me down like Cain of old. And he branded you along with me and our children would a-been born hewers of wood and drawers of water like the black men from the land of Nod. Him there in the crib'd be if he lives.

RHODA—Ah—God is a sneaking coward, their God! I hate him!

GILCHRIST—No, no! A just and righteous God, the Lord our God, like he says in the book. I was condemned here in my heart and I know now. To-night my soul testifies it unto me.

RHODA—Hurry and kill me then if you believe it.

GILCHRIST—[*Standing up and staring before him.*] I was blinded in my own strength. And now I see things clearer. Etta said I would. He sent signs to me and I wouldn't heed 'em. He sent Etta on the way with me to pray for me and bring me to the fold and I wouldn't heed him. I kept piling up the goods of this world and bragging in my own might. And then he sent death on her and a curse in her mouth to drive me from my evil ways and still I wouldn't heed him.

RHODA—He. He! who is he! Ah, a thief that kills, that steals the first-born!

GILCHRIST—[*Sitting down again.*] Hush, hush. Look how he's sent his warnings to me. He stayed hid back behind his sky somewhere and let me go on my way. He let me stand up in the morning of life

with you and taste of the joys of sin and when I was wropped away in it all he said to hisself, "Now I am the Great I Am and there's none beside me and I'll put forth my power and destroy him." And he sent fire from heaven to fall upon me and a drought to come in the summer and parch up my crops. That preacher he knew it all. The cholera come and killed off my hogs and he cursed the whole neighborhood because of me. And he says I got to answer to him, render up my account. I been out there under that pine where his lightning struck three times. I went and prayed to him and tried to get answer. And at last he heard me there with the wind and rain blowing. [*Calmly.*] He says death. [*Shouting.*] Death! And what was to be will be. . . . The God of these fields, the God of the whole universe says I got to make sacrifice unto Him. . . . Oh, Etta, Etta, hear me, speak to me and tell me you hear me now.

RHODA—[*Whispering.*] Their God, not our God.

GILCHRIST—Yes, the God of all. [*With a loud drunken-like cry.*] I hear you—yes—yes—— [*He moves awkwardly across the room towards the door at the right rear.*] Come up out of that wide field—too far—too far away. [*Whispering.*] Yes, yes, we are nothing. [RHODA *pushes herself in front of him.*] He is everything. Like a breath we are gone. He abideth and remaineth like the hills—from generation to generation. Man is a flower soon cut down.

RHODA—She's gone away from in there.

GILCHRIST—Death must wipe out death. I'm going to her.

RHODA—No, no, not you.

GILCHRIST—Me, me. It's got to be paid somehow. Death for death, an eye for an eye——

RHODA—If it's death, then he's paid. Look.

GILCHRIST—[*Clasping his head in his hands and staring at her.*] I'm crazy, crazy. I know I'm crazy, and yet I can't seem to stop. . . . Something driving me on. [*His voice sharp with pain.*] But he's beat me down. I'm tired now and I give in under his hand. . . . Ah, me, I don' know what to do.

RHODA—[*Pushing him toward the crib.*] Look now. It was to be him and not you.

GILCHRIST *gradually turns and stares down into the crib and then starts forward and puts his head upon the dead child. He turns and blinks at* RHODA *uncomprehendingly.*

GILCHRIST—[*Dully.*] Took him and spared me.

RHODA—[*Bitterly.*] The Great I Am that comes in the night! . . . A righteous God.

GILCHRIST—[*Starting back.*] Who done that?

RHODA—Him—her, God and Aunt Etta.

GILCHRIST—We didn't, did we? Not you and me? We didn't kill him too?

RHODA—[*Vehemently.*] She was here in the house and kept me afraid. Deep down I felt her stealing about, her spirit waiting to kill him.

GILCHRIST—Ha! She could never forget and never forgive. Fifteen year she said she loved me, and I don't know. Maybe she hated me.

RHODA—She did. She loved nobody.

GILCHRIST—Her God, he done it?

RHODA—A God of hate.

GILCHRIST—[*As if stung to sudden awareness.*] The innocent—I'm the guilty. [*Whining in sudden fury.*] Who would do that? [*Mumbling over and over.*] The innocent—the defenseless. [*His voice breaking in a bitter laugh.*] It wa'n't her, it was him behind her, principles, Gods—maybe something behind that, the way of things. [*Bending over the crib.*] He wants all. Whatever it is, that'll take all, will it? Take him and me and you and wipe us out . . . sweep us away like dust in a wind. [*The windows rattle in their sockets, and the wind booms around the house.*] Hah, listen at him there in the night. [*Beating the back of his hand fiercely in his palm.*] Same like he was trying to get in here at us —that wind is like God after us, like the world turned against us.

RHODA—[*Huskily, as she comes up and stands beside him.*] And we are not afraid.

GILCHRIST—[*Monotonously.*] Not afraid. [*Angrily.*] He comes when I'm gone and takes away my child.

RHODA—And spares you.

GILCHRIST—[*Savagely.*] To make me suffer more.

RHODA—Let it be, and we can bear it.

GILCHRIST—Now he's mashed us down to the bottom. The world wipes its feet on us. There's nothing else can happen to us, we're down, down at the bottom now.

RHODA—[*Weakly.*] But we can rise again.

GILCHRIST—[*Repeating childishly.*] Rise up and fight again. [*His hand wanders vaguely in the air before him, strengthening gradually into a clenched fist.*]

RHODA—[*Catching his arm.*] We both can. There's bound to be pleasure, joy somewhere for us.

GILCHRIST—[*Clutching her to him.*] Oh, Rhody, a little more—a little more.

RHODA—That can be the way—you and me in our love—together, going together.

GILCHRIST—[*Hungrily.*] Yes, yes. . . .

RHODA—Nothing can touch that—our love will remain, you and me together every day, you and me to

the end. See all this sorrow, like a purpose to it, and still it didn't touch our love.

GILCHRIST—[*Tenderly.*] They can't touch that. Nothing ever has and nothing ever will. That's so, nothing can keep me from loving you. [*Triumphantly.*] And nothing can keep you from loving me. Ah, I feel now maybe death couldn't. [*Feverishly.*] Rhody, Rhody, help me now. Let that lead us towards rest, towards peace, peace. . . .

RHODA—[*Whispering.*] Peace . . . salvation and mercy . . . in our love.

GILCHRIST—[*To himself.*] God can't kill that, nothing can. Yea, it is stronger than him, than all the world. It comes to me clearer now like a light—[*Wrinkling his forehead.*] like a great light.

RHODA—It is. And my love will never die.

GILCHRIST—Nor mine. . . . It lives. . . . It is life . . . life . . . Life is—you me—— [*Lifting up his face.*] Let the dead pass behind us—like a dream and leave us forever. Their way is the way of death. Ours the way of love and that is life. It is, ain't it, honey?

RHODA—Yes, yes.

GILCHRIST—[*As if seeing a vision.*] Love and life, love—life. It lives beyond death. [*His face crinkling into a smile.*] That's it, that's it. Life and more abundant life. You are my life, the one I love

. . . my wife and I'm not afraid now with you here. [*Mumbling.*] Somehow all I can think of is you here with me now, so close to me there's nothing else in the world for me to think of hardly.

RHODA—[*Almost dreamily.*] And never be afraid, never any more.

GILCHRIST—Not afraid of God even, their God that sets on his golden throne. No, not that. God, their God—— They are their god. But he's outside, up there in the sky—— [*Loudly.*] They put him up there. [*Striking his heart.*] In here is where he belongs. [*Loudly.*] Rhody, Rhody, up there he is death and destruction, in here he is peace, life. [*His voice dies out and he stands gazing at her with burning intensity.* RHODA *leans her head against his breast and they stand locked in each other's embrace. Presently there is a loud knock on the door at the rear. They pay no attention to it. It sounds again.* GILCHRIST *calls.*] Who's knocking there?

The door opens and the PREACHER *comes in dripping wet.*

PREACHER—[*Timidly.*] Brother Hardy, I left 'em praying. I had to come and speak with you again. [*They make no reply. The* PREACHER *moves further into the room.*] Aunt Margaret's still praying for ye, and she won't sleep till you're saved and to-night's the night you must be saved. [*He stops by the crib, hesitates and looks down. After a moment he draws back in awe.*] Lord ha' mercy on these pore

children! [*He watches them in sorrowful anguish.*] I'm sorry, sorry. [*Mournfully.*] From them that hath not it shall be taken even that which they hath.

GILCHRIST—[*Without looking around.*] Your God giveth and your God taketh away. Go tell Aunt Marg'ret we're saved.

PREACHER—[*Gazing at him hopefully.*] Blessed be the name of the Lord forever.

GILCHRIST—Cursed be his name forever.

PREACHER—Lord ha' mercy on him!

GILCHRIST—Still there's something never can be taken away. Amen!

PREACHER—The blessed light of God's love. Amen.

GILCHRIST—The light of our love.

RHODA—Yes, yes.

GILCHRIST—The light of life. Not the light up there, not the light from heaven.

RHODA—[*Dreamily.*] The light of our love that shall burn forever.

GILCHRIST—The light here in my breast and in your breast. The light of human beings that lighteth every man into this world. [*His face broken with a queer grieving happiness.*] And it will give us strength to go forth again in the morning. Now again

I'm strong and will be to the end. I was dreaming and now I am awake. [*The* PREACHER *stares at him in perplexity.*] Now again we'll go into the fields and sow and reap and bring forth the fruits of life.

RHODA—Me with you.

GILCHRIST—And me with you—both together. For the joy that's in us. [*His voice rising fresh and triumphant.*] And we'll raise up sons and daughters unto—unto—the light—our God. Yea, and I'll go into the church and call my people and tell them the way of our salvation, the way of truth, the way of—of—our God. [*Stammering.*] The God—the God who is in us. The one and only God. [*The* PREACHER *watches them in amazement.* GILCHRIST *waves his hand at him.*] Go and leave us alone, now we are saved and you can stop your prayers! [*Loudly.*] Leave us! [*The* PREACHER *backs away from them in distress and goes wonderingly out at the rear.* GILCHRIST *falls on his knees and embraces* RHODA.] We are God—Man is God. That's the light, that's the truth. It will set them free. And love shall abide among us to the end.

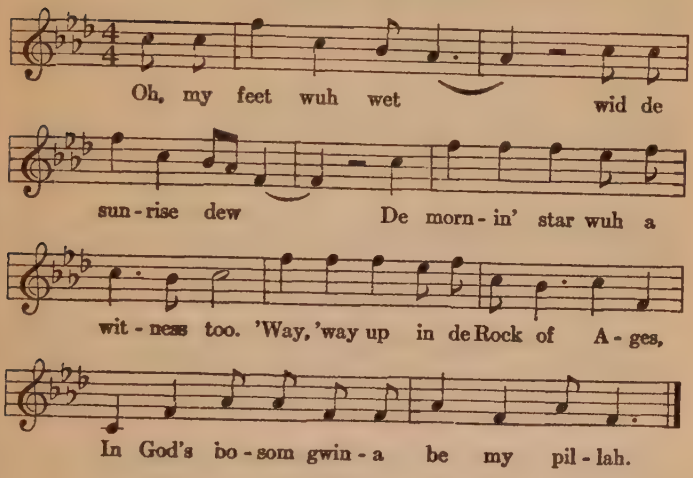
He kisses the hem of RHODA'S *skirt, his face touched again with a queer and indefinable sadness.*

RHODA—[*Her face shining through her tears.*] You are my God.

SONGS WITH MUSIC FROM

IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

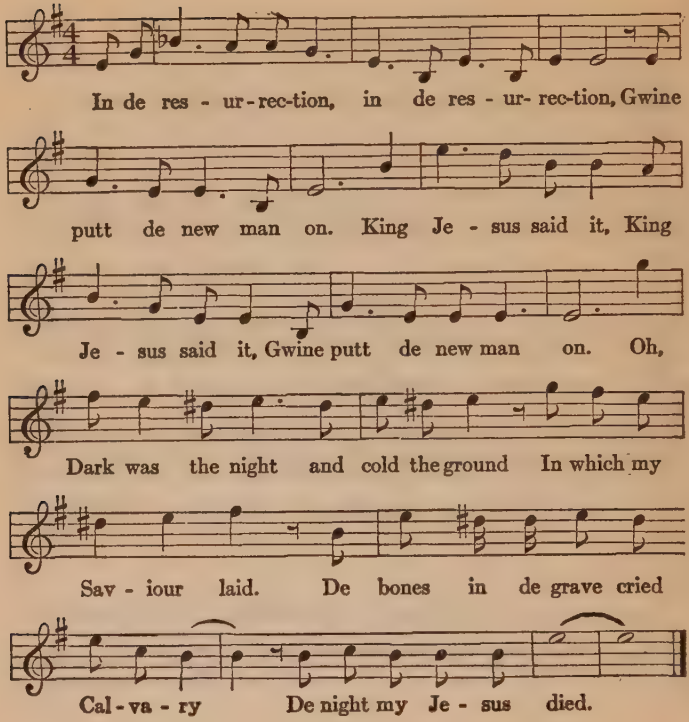
My Feet Wuh Wet


Oh, my feet wuh wet wid de
sun-rise dew De morn-in' star wuh a
wit-ness too. 'Way, 'way up in de Rock of A-ges,
In God's bo-som gwin-a be my pil-lah.

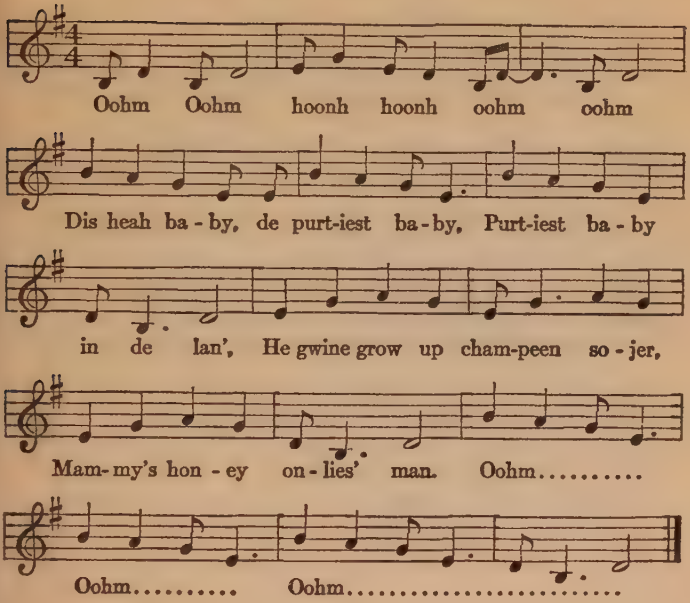
NOTE: I am indebted to Miss Adeline Denham for aid in arranging the music of these songs.

The Author.

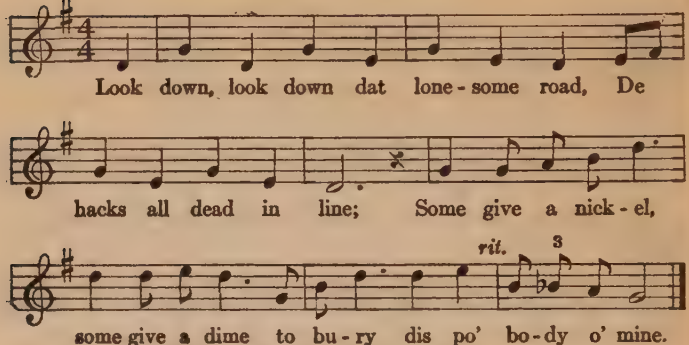
In de Resurrection


In de res - ur-rec-tion, in de res - ur- rec-tion, Gwine
putt de new man on. King Je - sus said it, King
Je - sus said it, Gwine putt de new man on. Oh,
Dark was the night and cold the ground In which my
Sav - iour laid. De bones in de grave cried
Cal - va - ry De night my Je - sus died.

Dis Heah Baby

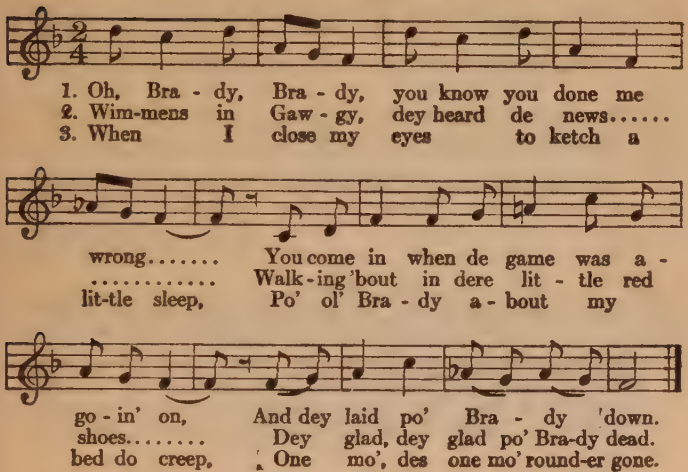

Oohm Oohm hoonh hoonh oohm oohm
Dis heah ba - by, de purt-iest ba - by, Purt-iest ba - by
in de lan', He gwine grow up cham-peen so - jer,
Mam- my's hon - ey on - lies' man. Oohm.....
Oohm..... Oohm.....

Look Down dat Lonesome Road

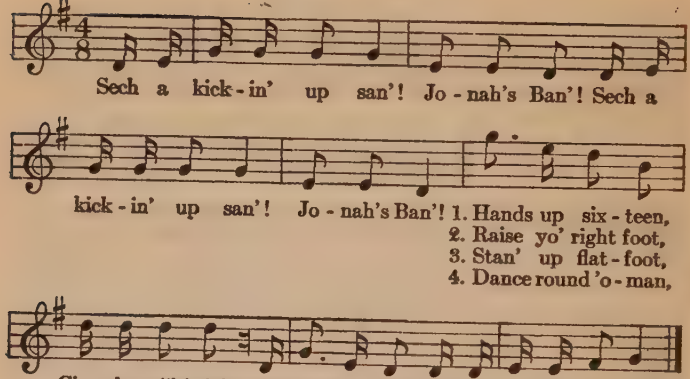

Look down, look down dat lone - some road, De
hacks all dead in line; Some give a nick - el,
rit.
3
some give a dime to bu - ry dis po' bo - dy o' mine.

Oh, Brady, Brady

Music by F. B. McCall


1. Oh, Bra - dy, Bra - dy, you know you done me
2. Wim-mens in Gaw - gy, dey heard de news.....
3. When I close my eyes to ketch a
wrong..... You come in when de game was a -
..... Walk-ing 'bout in dere lit - tle red
lit-tle sleep, Po' ol' Bra - dy a - bout my
go - in' on, And dey laid po' Bra - dy 'down.
shoes..... Dey glad, dey glad po' Bra-dy dead.
bed do creep, One mo', des one mo' round-er gone.

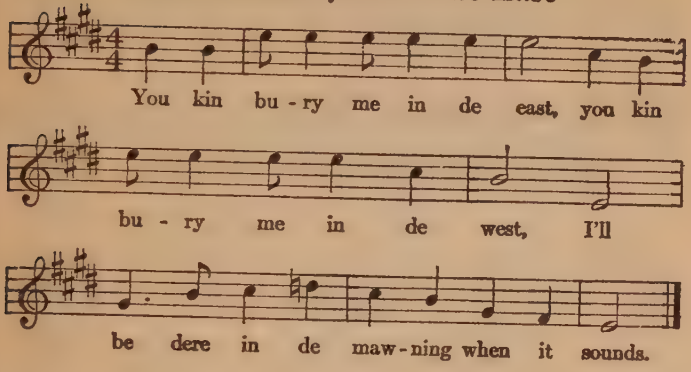
Jonah's Ban'


Sech a kick-in' up san'! Jo-nah's Ban'! Sech a
kick-in' up san'! Jo-nah's Ban'!
1. Hands up six-teen,
2. Raise yo' right foot,
3. Stan' up flat-foot,
4. Dance round 'o-man,
Cir-cle to (the) right We's gwin-a get big eat-ings dis night.
kick it up high. Oh, knock dat ole Mo-bile buck in de eye.
Jump-a dem bars. Oh, ka-ro back like a train o' cy-ars.
Show 'em de p'int, Dem yud-der coons don-ter how to coon-j'int.

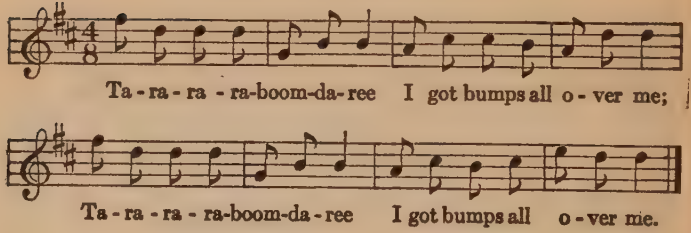
SONGS WITH MUSIC FROM

THE FIELD GOD

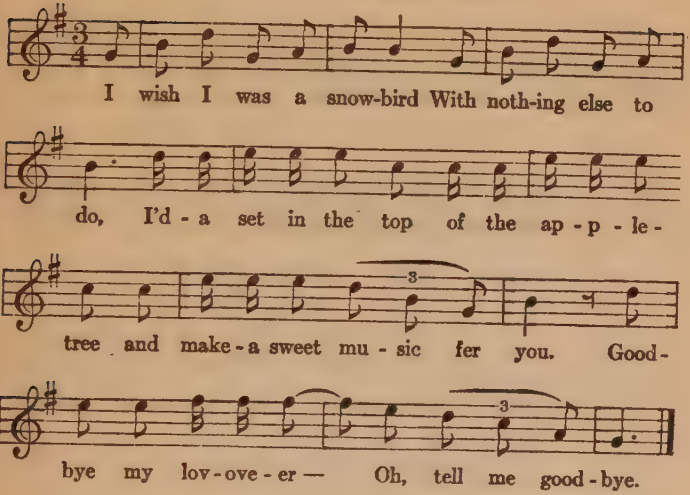
You Kin Bury Me in de East



Ta-ra-ra-ra-Boom-da-ree

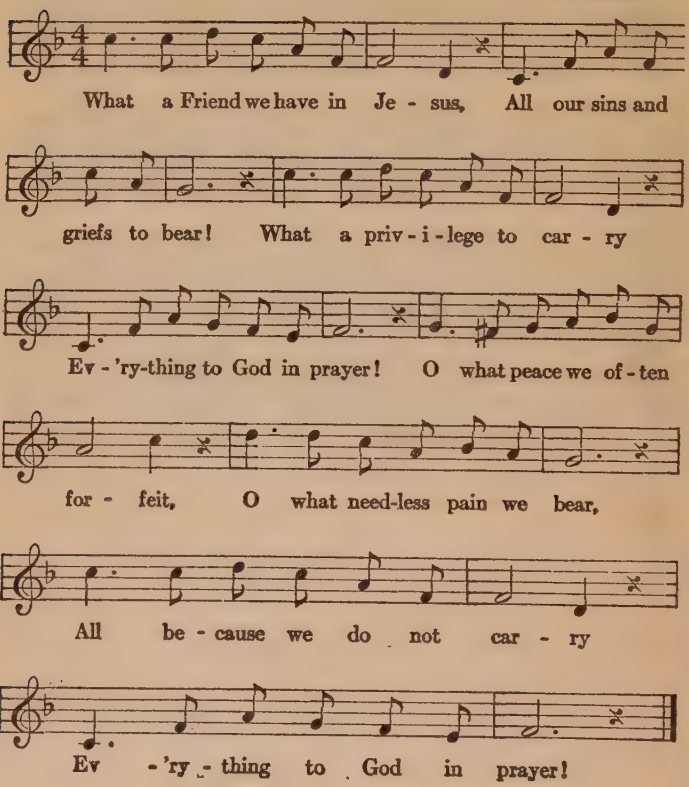


I Wisht I Was a Snowbird

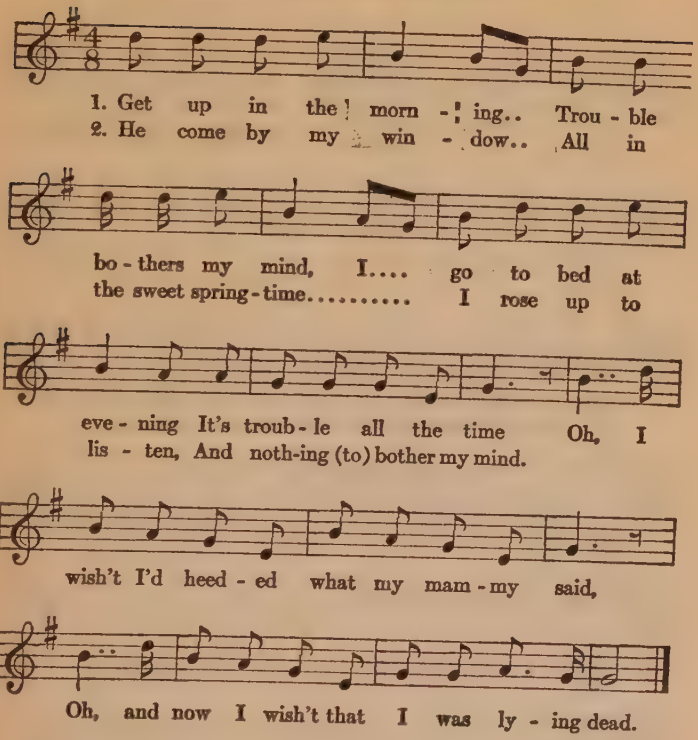

I wish I was a snow-bird With noth-ing else to
do, I'd - a set in the top of the ap - p - le -
tree and make - a sweet mu - sic fer you. Good -
bye my lov - ove - er — Oh, tell me good - bye.

What a Friend

H. Bonar C. C. Converse

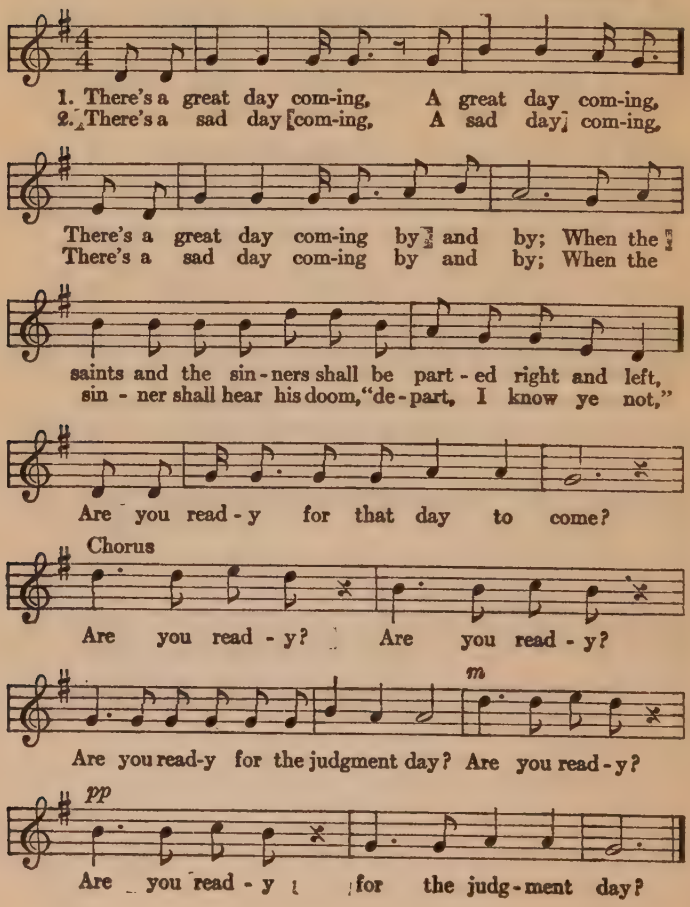

What a Friend we have in Je - sus, All our sins and
griefs to bear! What a priv - i - lege to car - ry
Ev - 'ry-thing to God in prayer! O what peace we of - ten
for - feit, O what need-less pain we bear,
All be - cause we do not car - ry
Ev - 'ry - thing to God in prayer!

Get Up in the Morning


1. Get up in the morn - ing.. Trou - ble
2. He come by my win - dow.. All in
bo - thers my mind, I.... go to bed at
the sweet spring-time..... I rose up to
eve - ning It's troub - le all the time Oh, I
lis - ten, And noth-ing (to) bother my mind.
wish't I'd heed - ed what my mam - my said,
Oh, and now I wish't that I was ly - ing dead.

There's a Great Day Coming

W. L. T. WILL L. THOMPSON


1. There's a great day com-ing, A great day com-ing,
2. There's a sad day com-ing, A sad day com-ing,
There's a great day com-ing by and by; When the
There's a sad day com-ing by and by; When the
saints and the sin-ners shall be part-ed right and left,
sin-ner shall hear his doom, "de-part, I know ye not,"
Are you read-y for that day to come?
Chorus
Are you read-y? Are you read-y?
m
Are you read-y for the judgment day? Are you read-y?
pp
Are you read-y for the judg-ment day?

WORD LIST

(Below is a list of pronunciations and meanings of certain folk or local expressions used in the plays and still current in eastern North Carolina. It may possibly be of some use to certain readers.)

ah (ăh, rarer äh).

anh (ănh).

Baltimore meat: fat-back, white side meat. Supposed to come from Baltimore where the hogs grew as big as mules.

bitty, bitsy: small, teenie-iny, little bitty or bitsy.

blaze, face: the part of the pine tree scarified above the box to increase the yield of crude gum. The blazes usually ended about seven or eight feet above the ground, though I have seen trees in North Carolina blazed to a height of twelve or fifteen feet.

box: the cavity or pocket cut in the base of the pine tree for the yield of gum. The boxing usually started in November and ended in March.

box: guitar.

bo (see hosscake).

brownie: one cent.

calf-rope: an expression denoting surrender, to call for help.

chipping: same as blazing or facing. Usually began in March and continued weekly up to October or

November. The instrument used was called a hack or chipper. Sometimes confused with *corner.*

corner: to cut a chip about one inch thick out of each corner of the box.

cracklings: the dried fat of hogs.

cradle: a scythe with a frame attached, for cutting what is called "small grain," i. e., oats, rye, and wheat. (Used as adjective, noun, or verb.)

dipping: emptying the boxes of the crude gum (often called dip). A flat, trowel-shaped blade with a stout handle was used. Boxes were dipped about seven times a season at intervals of, say, three weeks.

dough-face: mask.

down in the dumps: sick, unwell, same as *on the puny list.* (See *mulligrubs.*)

engineer: boss.

fascinator, vascinator: a cheap shawl.

fee-lark: field-lark.

guano trumpet: a funnel-shaped instrument, strung from the farmer's shoulder through which he "sows" guano with his hand.

gut: got.

g'ine: going. (Pronounced "guyn." The same Negro will also say "gwine.")

hah (hăh).

hanh (hănh).

hosscake: a general expression of address, used only with men. Same as *bo.*

Jaboh: monkey.

lick and a promise: slovenly, equal to slubber.
minner mind: have a mind to, should like to.
monkey riding: expression denoting complete exhaustion. Especially used about a person overcome with heat.
mulligrubs. (See *down in the dumps.*)
pine-blank: exactly, also means point-blank.
progueing: prowling, poking about.
put (often pŭt.)
raght: right.
rid chit'lings: emptying chitterlings of waste matter. A ridding-stick is used.
roached up: plumed up, raised.
sass: garden greens, such as collards, onions, cabbage, etc.
scraping: raking gum from the blazes. Due to the evaporation of volatile oils the gum hardened and would not run down into the boxes. This was scraped off with an instrument resembling a hoe. The scrape yielded about half as much turpentine as the dip. It was usually collected once a year, at the end of the season.
Upper Powers: heavenly spirits, including God, Jesus, and the angels, or forces of storm and cloud identified with them.
virgin: the first dipping from the boxes.
whales: welts.
wheel-hoss: one of the best, a term of approbation.

THE END